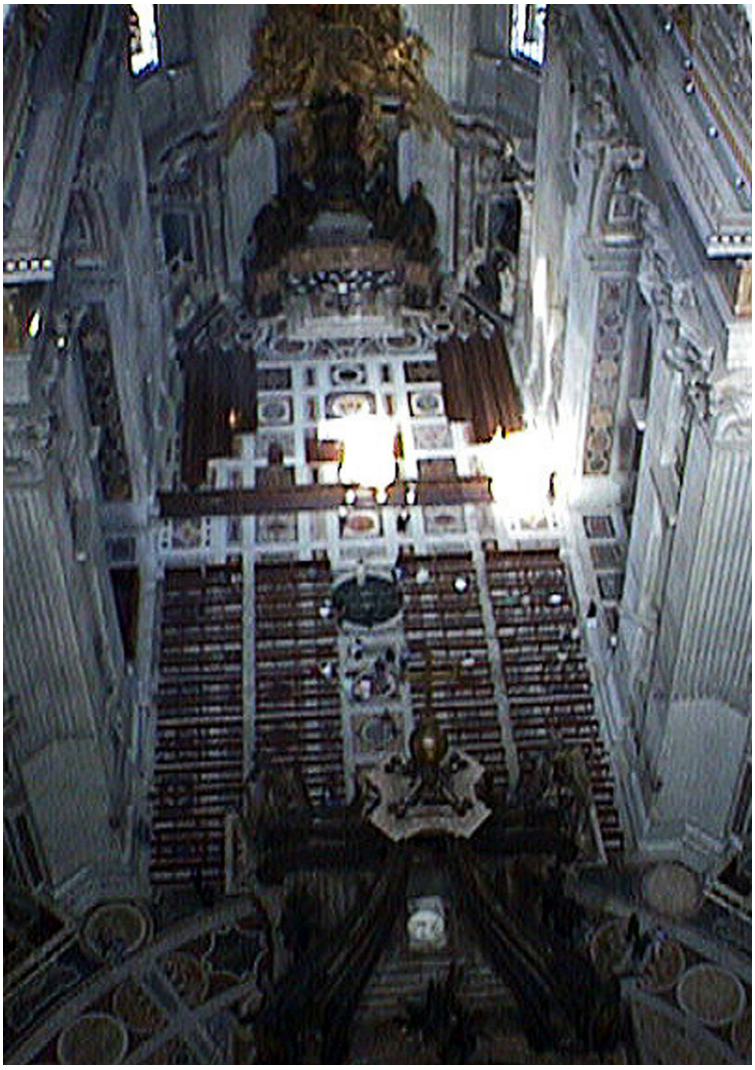
# The Lost Bible of Rome

## – Orphans of the Renaissance –

Toshiaki Kiryu



Inside St. Peter's Basilica, Rome

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## – Orphans of the Renaissance –

by Toshiaki Kiryu

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# About the Author

## Toshiaki Kiryu

Until retiring from the Government Publications Service Station in 2010, Toshiaki Kiryu was engaged in a unique publishing initiative known as "Order-Made Publishing," dedicated to discovering and publishing works that deserved to be shared regardless of their commercial viability. Even small-run publications were brought into circulation through the government publications distribution network. Over the course of his career, he helped bring nearly 200 works into the world.

In 2006, four years before his retirement, he also assisted in launching the PureHeart Essay Award (sponsored by Nippon Keori Kaisha, Ltd.), with Hirotada Ototake serving as chief judge. From the inaugural award in 2007 through the third award in 2009, Kiryu served alongside Ototake as a member of the judging panel for three consecutive years.

Today, embracing what he calls his "second life," Kiryu continues his publishing activities through UTA Book, promoting the importance of spiritual and inner awareness. At the same time, he pursues research and writing projects that transform the themes closest to his heart into narrative form.

# Prologue

Nagasaki, 1641

A single snowflake drifted down and settled lightly on the man's brow.

It vanished, leaving behind only a faint, cold touch.

The man paused and, still clutching an oil-paper bundle under his arm, looked up at the night sky.

It was past midnight. There was no one about. No sound, no sign of life.

Against the ink-dark sky, small white specks slowly began to multiply.

As he gazed upward, straining his eyes, it no longer felt as though the snow were falling.

Rather, it seemed as if he himself were being drawn up into the night sky.

How long had he stood there like that…?

At moments like this, everything felt trivial—nothing more than petty worries.

…And yet.

What on earth was he to do with this bundle?

From somewhere within, small, mean, all-too-human concerns began to stir and rise.

It had been ten years since the man had been exiled to Iki for theft.

That autumn, however, he had been pardoned on the occasion of the birth of a shogunal heir.

The child—then named Takechiyo—would later become Ietsuna, the fourth shogun.

Thanks to that pardon, he had been able to return to Nagasaki.

But he found no honest work. With the year's end approaching, he was on the verge of starvation.

That was when he set his sights on a confectionery shop in Hon-Hakata-machi—

a place called Kazusa, known for selling Nanban sweets.

For such a modest-looking shop, it was surprisingly prosperous.

There was something open about it—unguarded, almost careless.

In short, it looked easy to break into.

"This will be the last time," he told himself,

and resolved to rob the place.

The job went just as planned.

…But among the items he stole was something troublesome.

Hidden in the attic, carefully wrapped in oil paper, was a bundle that seemed to carry some secret.

He had taken it for something valuable. But when he opened it back home, it gave off an unmistakable sense of something forbidden—something Christian.

He could not keep it.

Yet burning it felt dangerous, as if it might bring a curse.

An uneasy dread clung to him.

After much hesitation, an idea came to him.

"That place…"

The precincts of Suwa Shrine—

the guardian shrine of Nagasaki.

If he left it somewhere there, surely even the magic or curses of the bateren would be subdued.

Yes… that would do.

Having made up his mind, the man hurried through the falling snow toward the shrine.

The next morning, one of the shrine priests at Suwa Shrine noticed a mound of white snow resting atop the offertory box in the main hall.

Brushing the snow aside, he found a square bundle wrapped in oil paper.

Suspicious, he carried it back to the shrine office and opened it.

From within layers of wrapping emerged a single, curious book.

On its cover were inscribed the words:

"BIBLIA SACRA."

# Chapter 1
# Pope Sixtus V

## 1

Rome, April 1968

An orange tram passes out of frame, and beyond it the camera captures the Porta del Popolo.

The Porta del Popolo—its formal name is Porta Flaminia. In earlier times, pilgrims traveling from Northern Europe entered Rome along the Via Flaminia, passing through this very gate. Today, stepping outside the gate, one finds trams and taxis constantly coming and going, and little remains of its former atmosphere. Yet for those pilgrims who had journeyed through the pastoral landscapes of northern Italy, arriving at this gate and seeing the grandeur of Rome spread beyond it must have stirred a deep emotion—"We have come to the City of God."

The camera moves forward, passing through the central arch of the three gates and emerging into Piazza del Popolo. At the center of the square stands an obelisk said to have been brought from Egypt. Beyond it rise the domes of the twin churches, and three roads stretch outward, guiding pilgrims toward the Vatican, forming a picture-postcard symmetry.

As the camera zooms in on a fountain beside the obelisk, a young man climbs onto its edge and raises his camera. Nearby, several youths sit idly on the base of the obelisk. Around the fountain, couples walk hand in hand.

…Then, a single large raindrop splashes onto the pavement, leaving a dark mark.

In an instant, the stain spreads. The bright Roman dusk, almost like midday, is suddenly swallowed by a passing shower, and darkness falls.

People—tourists and locals alike—rush for shelter: beneath the three gates of the Porta del Popolo, under the colonnades of the twin churches, and at the entrance of Santa Maria del Popolo. The camera picks out a young Japanese woman among them.

Though she knows it's useless, she holds her daypack over her head and runs, splashing through shallow puddles.

She runs… and runs…

Before long, she realizes her choice was a mistake.

The entrance to Santa Maria del Popolo, which she instinctively headed for, has no proper overhang to shield her from the rain. She should have run for the gate—or the twin churches…

Pressing herself into a slight recess by the door, she tries to protect herself from the rain as best she can.

…Then, her back accidentally pushes the door open.

The moment she steps inside, the pounding rain suddenly disappears.

It is a dim, narrow space. To the side, there is another door.

Hesitantly, she opens it.

Inside spreads a wide, quiet space, filled with the evening Mass. The sound of Latin prayers deepens the stillness.

As if protesting that silence, her stomach lets out a loud growl.

The worshippers are gathered toward the front pews of the chapel. It seems no one has noticed the awkward interruption—or perhaps they are pretending not to hear.

Unable to bear her hunger, she quietly rummages through her daypack.

Rustle… rustle…

Still, no one seems to hear.

At last, the faint sound of unwrapping a piece of chocolate.

Still unnoticed.

(It should be fine… Even God would forgive this much!)

She reassures herself and slowly brings the chocolate to her lips.

Close-up.

At that very moment—

A sharp, crisp cracking sound as she bites into it.

All at once, the worshippers turn toward her. In perfect unison, they raise a finger to their lips:

"Shhh!"

At that instant, a close-up of the chocolate appears, along with the product name in a superimposed credit.

After the credit, the scene ends with a snapshot-like image: the worshippers, even the priest, gathered around her in the now rain-cleared Piazza del Popolo, laughing as they bite into

chocolate together.

A rainbow in the background—no doubt that will have to be added later.

Tormented by an overwhelming sense of unease, Yasuo woke in the middle of the night.

He checked the clock. It was only two in the morning.

He tried to go back to sleep, but his eyes remained wide open, refusing to close.

(The shoot went perfectly… so what is this feeling?)

Unable to sleep, Yasuo began to replay the entire day's commercial shoot in his mind, searching for the source of his anxiety.

At the time, it had been an unusual concept.

When people think of Rome, they imagine a sky of flawless blue. Countless photographs and films had portrayed it that way. Even in Roman Holiday, Audrey Hepburn's black-and-white world, audiences could almost feel the brilliance of that sky.

And yet, this commercial had chosen rain as its theme.

Moreover, there would be no background music until the final scene—only the sound of rain, the crunch of chocolate, the rustle of bags, and silence.

It was certainly an interesting idea. And indeed, in March, when Rome enters the tourist season, the weather is as fickle as the Romans themselves. One moment it shines brilliantly; the next, a sudden downpour sweeps through the city.

Director Yamamoto had probably experienced this firsthand on his honeymoon.

But now it was April.

Would the rain really cooperate?

Some shots could be faked with artificial rain. But a wide shot of Piazza del Popolo in the rain… that would be another matter.

If things went badly, the shoot might turn into a long wait—not for sunshine, but for rain.

And on an overseas location, that was unacceptable.

A commercial had a budget.

No matter how much the sponsor liked the concept, it didn't mean they could spend without limit.

And yet, contrary to all those worries, they were blessed—not with clear skies, but with a sudden shower—on the very first day of shooting.

Some of the exterior shots could be secured while waiting for the extras to assemble at ten.

Of course, the director protested.

"Even if the sun doesn't set until after eight in Rome, morning light and evening light are completely different."

Still, from the standpoint of production management—taking into account the producer and sponsor—it was only natural to want to keep the cameras rolling as much as possible.

In the end, they reached a compromise: the real take would be filmed after the interior scenes, and for now they would simply

capture “test shots” and “backup footage.”

That decision proved fortunate.

Just as the cameraman hoisted the heavy 35mm camera onto his shoulder, the rain began to fall—suddenly, without warning.

At that point, distinctions like morning light and evening light no longer mattered.

Everyone—even Producer Fuji, who normally had no reason to run around—rushed about in a frenzy beneath the rain.

“Before it stops!”

“Before it stops…!”

As if sensing their urgency, the rain showed no sign of letting up.

And yet, when they finally finished and checked the time, only one hour had passed.

It felt as though three or four hours had gone by.

On the faces of the staff, the sponsor, and even the model—soaked to the skin—smiles naturally spread.

An inexplicable sense of unity filled the group.

At that point, words were no longer necessary.

As if possessed by something, everyone moved as one.

What had been planned as a two-and-a-half-day shoot—excluding the rain scenes—was completed in a single day.

And not only that—the one element they had worried about most, Rome’s rain, had been captured on film.

There was nothing to worry about.

Everything had gone perfectly.

The entire Rome shoot had been completed in just one day.

Director Yamamoto, cameraman Hirose, lighting technician Okuda—even Producer Fuji, known as "Demon Fuji"—praised Yasuo, saying:

"You handled the production brilliantly this time."

They even credited the favorable weather as if it were the result of his effort.

And yet, the return flight to Japan—the earliest one—was still two days away.

The cameraman was confident in the footage.

The director said there was no need for additional or backup shots.

And so Producer Fuji made a bold decision.

"Tomorrow—we go sightseeing in Rome!"

At eight in the evening, after consulting with a guide, they learned that Green Line Tours operated until 8:45.

While everyone else enjoyed an Italian dinner, filled with relief and satisfaction after the shoot, Yasuo visited the Green Line Tours office on Via Farini with a Japanese interpreter.

Everything was in order.

With ten people, including the guide, they could simply join the regular sightseeing bus departing at noon the next day—no need to arrange a private vehicle.

Everything was falling into place.

Everything he did went smoothly.

He should have felt happy.

And yet, an unshakable unease clung to him.

No matter how hard he tried, he could not fall asleep.

The changes in Yasuo had begun around the time he was selected for this production—and when the Rome location shoot was decided.

At first, he had been thrilled.

(This is my chance to see the main stage of early modern Japan–Europe relations.)

While working at a commercial production company in Osaka, he was also enrolled in the history department of a night university.

He had one year left until graduation.

After that, he would likely be hired as a full employee of the company, no longer just under contract.

All that remained was to complete his graduation thesis.

The theme he had chosen was:

"The Red Seal Ship Trade and the Persecution of Christians in Early Modern Nagasaki."

It was an attempt to examine the rise and fall of Christianity in early Edo-period Japan—not from a religious perspective, but from an economic one.

During his research, one figure began to emerge repeatedly:

Thomas Araki.

A Japanese man who had traveled to Rome to study, become a padre, and returned to Japan.

But by the time he came back, Christianity had been banned.

He was arrested and subjected to torture.

While many believers endured brutal persecution without yielding and were martyred, Thomas alone abandoned his faith and chose to live as an official investigator of Christians.

And even after becoming such an official, he attempted to return to Christianity—only to break again under torture, renouncing his faith a second time.

To abandon Christianity was called "to fall."

To fall twice—

Perhaps there was no one else quite like Thomas Araki.

Yasuo knew that Thomas had little direct relevance to the argument of his thesis.

And yet, he could not stop thinking about him.

He even felt that he wanted nothing to do with such a man.

And yet, the more he tried to avoid him, the more Thomas appeared—again and again—in the materials he studied.

Each time he surfaced, each time he rose into Yasuo's awareness, Yasuo rejected him.

"I hate this man. I never want to be like him."

"I don't even want to think about someone like him."

It was Thomas's weakness that disturbed him.

And each time he condemned that weakness, Yasuo felt an uncomfortable sense that he himself was being judged.

"I'm not like him."

But the more he insisted on that, the more he came to despise Thomas.

He could not forgive him.

Perhaps, by denying Thomas, Yasuo was trying to reassure himself that he was different—that he was not that kind of person.

Around the time the Rome shoot was decided, Yasuo began to experience sleep paralysis.

As he drifted into sleep, he would feel as if something were pressing down on his body, pinning him in place.

No matter how hard he struggled, he could not move.

And then, images would begin to appear.

A dim, stone underground cell.

A man crouched alone.

He looked European.

With hollow eyes, he stared directly at Yasuo.

This happened several times.

Eventually, the visions began to appear even in his dreams.

In those dreams, Yasuo wandered through various towns—

European streets, or dry, earthen-walled towns of the Middle East.

Yet they all had one thing in common:

They were completely empty.

As he wandered, he would always find a staircase leading downward.

"I don't want to go… I don't want to go…"

Even so, his body moved on its own.

Down the stairs.

Toward that underground cell.

Toward the man waiting there.

And then he would wake—drenched in sweat.

Since arriving in Rome, he had been so busy with work that he had forgotten all of it.

But today—

During the shoot inside Santa Maria del Popolo—

He saw a girl standing in the shadow of a column along the side aisle.

She looked as if she had stepped out of a medieval painting.

A veil draped over her head, its white fabric accentuating her refined features.

A strange sensation.

As if he had seen her before.

As if he had experienced this before.

A sense of déjà vu.

And ever since he saw her—
That unease had returned.

## 2

### Rome, 1585

In April of that year, in the Vatican, on the uppermost floor of the papal palace, an old man was about to breathe his last.

The old man thought:

Eighty-four years… I have lived long indeed. Thirteen years as Pope of Rome. As a servant of God, standing at the summit of the Christian world, I believe I have done what I could. And yet… was this truly enough?

Before the cardinals gathered at his bedside, the Pope spoke in a faint but steady voice.

"A weak man such as I have borne this heavy responsibility. Until this very day, there has not been a single day when my heart did not tremble. I ask you, cardinals gathered here: if there has been anything in me that has offended you, I beg you to wipe it all away from the depths of your hearts, and pray for me as I

suffer this final battle against death…"

And at the end, he entrusted the Christian republic to the cardinals.

"After I have drawn my last breath, choose as Pope a man who will fulfill that office under any circumstances."

Thus the old man, though in pain, somehow completed his final duty as Pope, and as if relieved, quietly closed his eyes.

Two hours later, the death of Gregory XIII was announced.

It is said that, at the very end, the Pope whispered to his son, the Duke of Sora:

"I wonder how the Japanese boys are doing…"

And with those words, he passed away.

At last, the old man had been released from his thirteen-year burden as Pope of Rome.

The Pope was dead.

As soon as the news was conveyed to those waiting in the adjoining rooms, various calculations began to race through their minds. Most of them concerned who the next Pope would be.

Among them, the thoughts of Claudio Acquaviva, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, were especially complex.

When he had become Superior General of the Jesuits at the age of thirty-seven and had gone to visit Pope Gregory XIII to offer his formal greetings, Gregory had cried out:

"Too young!"

To this, Acquaviva had replied:

"Your Holiness, please rest assured. On that point, I shall improve year by year."

Gregory loved Acquaviva's wit. From then on, the Pope's attitude toward the Jesuits became even more favorable than before.

And now, four years later, as the Japanese boy envoys arrived in Rome, the Pope's expectations and trust in the Jesuits had reached their peak. In January of that year, the Jesuits had even been granted exclusive rights to the mission in Japan.

And now that very Pope Gregory had so suddenly departed this world.

Should the children from Japan be made to attend the funeral?

Itō Mancio.

Chijiwa Miguel.

Hara Martinho.

Nakaura Julião.

And the attendant boy, Dorado.

The faces of the five boys rose in Acquaviva's mind.

Nakaura Julião, bedridden from the exhaustion of the long journey. Dorado, staying by his side and caring for him.

And the other three boys, who by now were likely being led by Father Mesquita on a pilgrimage through the seven churches of Rome.

How would they receive this news?

The boys had come all the way from distant Japan, led by Father Mesquita, as an embassy from that country.

Strictly speaking, however, it might be more accurate to call the embassy a great demonstration staged by the Jesuits to display the success of their missionary work in the East.

At that time, Japan still had no unified national government. Boys from distinguished but fallen daimyo families were presented as noble princes of Japan. The plan was to introduce European culture and power to Japan, while in Rome, it would demonstrate the achievements of Jesuit mission work in the East and seek financial support for future evangelization.

The Tenshō Embassy to Europe had been planned in this way by Father Valignano, the Jesuit Visitor to Japan. With the Kyushu Christian lords such as Ōtomo Sōrin serving as nominal sponsors, and with the support of Oda Nobunaga, the warlord who had only recently gained control over central Japan, the plan was put into action.

Through the efforts of Acquaviva in Rome and Valignano in Japan, the project succeeded brilliantly.

Pope Gregory XIII was deeply pleased with these first fruits from Japan. He granted the boy envoys a formal audience, and on that occasion promised full support for the mission in Japan.

More than that, he showed particular concern for the health of the deputy envoy, Nakaura Julião, who had fallen ill. He even granted him a private audience, offering words of comfort and appreciation for his hardships.

But that joy lasted only briefly.

The Pope fell critically ill, and in the blink of an eye, passed away.

Who would become the next Pope?

Whoever the next Pope might be, would the Jesuits be able to secure the same support for their mission in Japan?

There were already strong criticisms of the Jesuits' monopoly over the Japanese mission. Taking this opportunity, other religious orders would surely begin to move.

Even so, having the boy envoys attend the funeral would be a necessary appeal. It would reaffirm, before the Holy See, the importance of missionary support for Japan.

And yet, on the other hand, when Acquaviva considered the future of the Japanese mission and of the boys themselves, another thought arose:

Perhaps they should not attend.

Father Valignano had sternly warned Mesquita:

"Show them only what they ought to see. What is undesirable must not be shown."

At this funeral, there is no telling what may happen.

Acquaviva's anxiety was not without reason.

At this time, Rome stood in the midst of the Counter-Reformation.

Once, the great wave known as the Renaissance had swept across Europe. Medieval human beings, once powerless and able only to rely upon God, had gradually come to believe in human power—and even to take pride in it.

They came to think that it was none other than human power that could manifest the majesty of God. They competed in architecture and art, and before long, sought to uncover the mysteries of nature itself, even hoping to reveal within them the secrets of God.

As a result, the study of astrology, alchemy, and magic flourished. People sought Greek philosophy and eagerly absorbed the mysticism of Judaism and Egypt as well.

This was the rise of those commonly called humanists.

From this current of humanism, the Reformation eventually began to sprout.

Attacking the corruption of the Church, Luther argued that human beings were saved not through the Church, but only through the Word of God—the Bible. And by means of the newly invented printing press and the art of printing, he spread his message.

In considering how the Reformation withstood Catholic suppression and penetrated the European world of the time, one cannot ignore the spread of printing. Had the printing press not been invented, Luther would very likely have been burned at the stake as a heretic before long.

Now, on the Catholic side as well, a movement arose to counter this Reformation—a movement that might be called the Counter-Reformation.

Among the Popes and cardinals of the Renaissance age, there had been many lovers and patrons of Renaissance art. There were

even scholars who called themselves humanists.

But by the middle of the sixteenth century, when the age of the Counter-Reformation arrived, a darker tone suddenly began to spread.

Beginning with Paul IV, who became Pope in 1555, and continuing through Pius IV, Pius V, and Gregory XIII, each Pope was strict, stubborn, earnestly serious, a defender of orthodox faith—and an absolute supporter of the Roman Inquisition.

Paul IV, in particular, declared that "virtue, not beauty, should be the concern of a Pope." During his reign, sexual misconduct was punished with extreme cruelty, and men accused of sodomy were burned alive.

This severity made him deeply hated by the citizens of Rome. At his death, it is said that the head was struck from his statue, the body dragged through the streets, and finally thrown into the Tiber River.

The Dominican Order, condemned for the excesses of the Inquisition, was also attacked by a violent mob.

The Popes who followed were much the same.

Pius V was zealous in pursuing and punishing atheists. He had risen to the papacy from the position of Grand Inquisitor of the Roman Inquisition. After he became Pope, the power of the Inquisition increased, its sphere of activity expanded, and there was virtually no place beyond its reach.

Fortunately, the funeral of Pius V passed without incident.

Still, there was no telling when the dissatisfaction of the

Roman citizens might overflow in search of an outlet.

The destruction of a statue was one of the milder outcomes. There had even been Popes whose corpses were dragged out and cast aside.

As for Gregory, though he had established the Gregorian calendar in 1582 and made great contributions to the Church's worldwide mission—most notably through the founding of the Roman College—he was no less a defender of orthodox faith than Paul IV.

His reputation among the citizens was by no means favorable.

More than anything, what was ominous was that nothing had happened for twenty-five years, ever since Pius IV.

At this funeral, there was no knowing what might occur.

If the Japanese boys were made to stand there, and if some unforeseen incident were to break out before their eyes…

Acquaviva thought:

Had it truly been wise to bring the Japanese boys to Europe at this time?

Europe was shaking violently over the Reformation.

The Protestants burned Catholics at the stake, and the Catholics burned Protestants.

In France, the Huguenots had been massacred in the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre. Gregory himself had even issued a commemorative medal for the event and loudly sung the Te Deum, the hymn of thanksgiving.

Amid all this, the citizens of Rome had no faith whatsoever in

so-called religious justice. They only deepened their resentment and resistance toward an overly severe papal court.

If the boys were made to attend the funeral, then one wrong step might force them to face the contradictions hidden within the Christian world itself.

Valignano had said:

"Show them only what they ought to see…"

## 3

### Rome, April 1968

From the seat behind him, Producer Fuji leaned forward and jabbed Yasuo.

"Hey! Weren't we supposed to have a Japanese guide?"

At the front of the bus, a young man in a bright navy blazer was cheerfully delivering his commentary—in lively English.

Laughter broke out from time to time.

Around Yasuo, only the Japanese interpreter was laughing.

Yasuo and Fuji shot him a simultaneous glare.

The interpreter merely shrugged.

"Well… Italy isn't quite as precise as Japan…"

"Check at the next stop," Yasuo muttered. "We paid double for a Japanese-guided tour."

Fuji seemed about to add something, but after a brief click of

his tongue, he sank back into his seat.

Before long, the bus arrived at St. Peter's Basilica.

As soon as it pulled into the Vatican parking area, Yasuo jumped out, leading the Japanese group.

Then—

"Excuse me, are you on the Japanese tour?"

A woman's voice called out from behind.

He turned.

A cheerful-looking Italian woman was approaching them.

"You're on the wrong bus," she said. "This is the English tour."

Pointing to another bus behind them, she added:

"From here on, please take that one—the one with the sign in Japanese on the windshield, Rome–Vatican Course."

Her Japanese was fluent.

Behind her stood a group of Japanese tourists—young couples who looked like they were on their honeymoon, along with a cluster of energetic middle-aged women.

I see… that solves one problem, Yasuo thought.

Following her guidance, they boarded the elevator inside St. Peter's and ascended to the rooftop.

From the top of St. Peter's, the entire city of Rome spread out below them.

Even for those who were not Christians, the view stirred

something deep within.

Inside, the impact was even more overwhelming—the immense interior of the dome, completed through the legacy of Michelangelo and Bernini, struck the senses with breathtaking force.

Compared to that presence, the guide's explanations sounded thin and distant.

Looking up, the enormous dome seemed to press down from above.

Looking down, the vast nave stretched beneath, filled with tourists who looked no bigger than grains of sand.

(This is Rome… I'm standing in what was once the center of the world!)

After circling the colonnade around the dome, Yasuo shook his dizzy head and, driven by the swell of emotion, rushed down toward the chapel far below.

He was among the first to reach the ground level.

In one corner of the chapel, he noticed a small entrance.

Looking closer, it appeared to lead underground.

The American tourists who had been with him earlier were already lining up, being drawn inside one after another.

It led to the Vatican crypts—where the Popes lay buried.

Yasuo felt his legs freeze.

(What is this…? I don't like this. I don't want to go. It's just

like that dream… I don't want to go.)

And yet, against his will, his feet moved.

Before he knew it, he had joined the line behind the Americans and was already walking toward the underground passage.

At the bottom, stone sarcophagi of past Popes stretched along one side of the corridor.

Yasuo had no way of knowing which belonged to whom.

Some were grand, with reliefs of the Popes carved upon their lids.

Others were plain, almost crude.

On the stone walls were signs indicating that this place had once been part of a Roman arena, and in places, original sections of the ancient walls were preserved and displayed.

Suddenly—

The lights went out.

A scream—probably from an American woman.

From another direction came the voices of American men:

"Don't move!"

"Stay cool!"

A power outage?

But Yasuo had never experienced darkness like this.

It was absolute—like ink poured over everything. Nothing could be seen.

Even without being told "Don't move," there was no way anyone could move in such a place.

In this underground labyrinth, stripped of light—

movement itself was terror.

Yasuo stood frozen, as if paralyzed.

If he moved, it felt as though everything—including himself—would disappear.

He didn't understand why.

He was simply afraid.

How long had he stood there?

When he became aware again, the noise was gone.

As if sound itself had been swallowed into the depths of the darkness along with the light.

Not only the sound—

Even the presence of other people had vanished.

It was as if he had been left alone at the bottom of the void.

—I'm scared… truly scared.

He wanted to cry out, but his throat had gone dry, and no voice would come.

I should have stayed with the others…

At that very time—

In the chapel above

(though in truth, it was 380 years earlier),

Preparations for the funeral of Gregory XIII were steadily underway.

St. Peter's Basilica, April 1585

By order of the papal master of ceremonies, the Pope's body was moved to a room known as the Sala del Papagallo, the Parrot Room.

There, those who had served closest to him washed the body and purified it with fragrant perfumes. Costly oils and balms were then applied, and the Pope was dressed in red vestments, the mourning attire of the papacy.

Over his shoulders was placed the pallium, a white linen band marked with black crosses, the symbol of papal authority. A mitre was set upon his head, and three red pillows were arranged beneath him.

When all preparations were complete, the body was placed upon a bier and carried to the papal chapel.

There, prayers were offered by the assembled clergy. After that, an even larger procession was formed, and the remains were transferred with full ceremony to St. Peter's Basilica.

There, too, prayers and rites were performed. The body was then removed from the coffin and laid out before the central altar, so that the people might behold it, pay reverence, and kiss it.

From that day forward, for nine days, every part of St. Peter's was adorned with the coat of arms of Gregory XIII. Inside the basilica, a memorial monument, like a temporary tomb honoring the deceased, was erected. Around it stood the masters of ceremony and other officials in long ceremonial robes and mourning dress.

All those in attendance were given torches made of pure white wax, and these were lit.

The funeral proceeded with solemn dignity. The atmosphere was almost mystical.

Yet contrary to its outward appearance, the hearts of those involved knew not a moment of rest as they thought of the nine days ahead.

When would the long-accumulated anger of the people explode?

And when it did, the people would become a mob—and the Vatican Palace their prey.

The clergy could only carry on the ceremony while praying, with all their hearts, that nothing would happen.

On the first day of the funeral, the doors of the great basilica—kept closed and guarded by the Swiss Guards since the Pope's death—were opened for public farewell.

The faces of the Swiss Guards, dressed in blue, yellow, and red uniforms as if they had stepped out of a fairy tale, were tense.

Despite their appearance, they were said to be among the fiercest mercenaries in the world.

The brutality of Swiss mercenaries was such that, according to rumor, if they wanted to seize a bracelet, they would not waste time threatening the wearer to remove it. They would simply cut off the arm itself.

Their methods were that rough.

Perhaps it came from the poverty of their homeland. Yet for that very reason, they were fearless and held their lives cheaply.

It was this courage that had been valued since the time of Julius II, when Swiss mercenaries were first employed as Vatican guards. From then on, generation after generation, the Swiss served as the Pope's personal protectors.

Incidentally, their flamboyant uniforms were said to have been designed by Michelangelo, and the blue, yellow, and red were said to represent the colors of the Medici family.

Yet even these Swiss Guards seemed unsettled on this day.

Even the voices of the choir sounded, somehow, a little hurried.

Before long, one cardinal stepped up to the central altar.

He was to deliver the funeral oration for Gregory XIII.

His name was Alessandro Ottaviano de' Medici.

At this time, he was forty-nine years old.

He was said to be the illegitimate son of Alessandro de' Medici, the first Duke of Florence. Yet unlike his father, his open and generous nature recalled rather his great-uncle, Lorenzo the Magnificent.

He was especially gifted in diplomacy.

During the reign of Gregory XIII, as Florentine ambassador in Rome, he had served as a bond between Florence and the Vatican. He had also been dispatched by Gregory as papal legate to France, then shaken by conflict between Catholics and

Protestants, where he devoted himself to restoring the order of the Roman Church.

There, he gained the trust of the French queen, Catherine de' Medici, who came from the same Medici family.

When he eventually returned to the Vatican, his presence carried weight from two directions: on one side, the designs of the great power of France; on the other, the intentions of the city-state of Florence.

Whether he wished it or not, he had become a figure of considerable influence in the papal court, both openly and behind the scenes.

Alessandro thought:

What a crowd they have gathered. But how many here truly mourn the death of the Pope? Those close to him attend this funeral hiding ambition and self-preservation in their hearts. Those far from him—the common people—have gathered here waiting for something to happen.

As he spoke of Gregory's achievements, he looked over the faces of those in attendance.

The vast space of St. Peter's, empty until that very morning, was now filled with an enormous sea of people.

The front was occupied first by familiar faces: masters of ceremony, foreign envoys, and nobles.

Gradually, nameless townspeople mingled among them.

Farther back, the crowd became a mass of indistinct faces,

overflowing from the interior of the basilica through the doors and out into St. Peter's Square.

Alessandro turned his eyes toward the front rows.

There stood the Japanese boys in formal dress.

Accompanied by Father Mesquita, they stood upright with somber expressions at the point where the row of masters of ceremony gave way to the row of foreign envoys.

At least there are some here who truly mourn the Pope's death…

Alessandro thought so.

Then he noticed that one of the four boys was missing.

Is Julião still unwell?

Alessandro had first met the Japanese boys at the welcoming ball held for them by the distinguished Medici family of Florence.

The embassy from Japan had first set foot on European soil in August 1584.

After a journey of two and a half years, they arrived in Lisbon, then crossed the Iberian Peninsula by land, receiving welcomes in various places along the way. From Alicante, they crossed the Mediterranean by ship, and in March 1585, finally landed at the Italian port of Livorno.

At that time, Italy was divided among several powers: the Republic of Venice and the Duchy of Milan in the north, the Kingdom of Naples and the Papal States in the south, and between them, the Duchy of Florence and Tuscany.

Florence's geographical position reflected its political position.

Although rivalries among the Italian city-states had begun to soften with the rise of great powers such as Spain, France, and England, Florence still played the role of a key pivot between north and south in Italy.

And the family that moved Florence was none other than the Medici.

Florence and the Medici family had once flourished under Cosimo de' Medici. But after many political upheavals, the Florentine Republic had become the Duchy of Tuscany, and its rule had passed from the direct Medici line to the line of Cosimo's younger branch.

Alessandro had been born during that turbulent period in which the Duchy of Tuscany was coming into being, as the illegitimate son of Alessandro de' Medici, the first Duke of Florence.

His mother was unknown.

His father, after dictatorship and sexual excess, had been assassinated.

The illegitimate children left behind by Alessandro were taken in by Duchess Margaret, who had come from the Habsburg family as his bride. But she became a widow at only sixteen, and before long, at the instruction of her father, Charles V, remarried Ottavio Farnese.

At that time, she entrusted several of her late husband Alessandro's illegitimate children to the Church.

But Alessandro alone, not yet two years old, was placed in a foundling home in Florence, together with the grand name

Alessandro Ottaviano de' Medici.

To give him a name that revealed his lineage—

That was the only affection a sixteen-year-old girl could offer.

And now, in the age of Francesco I, the Duchy of Tuscany had entered a new phase. Alessandro, too, as a cardinal, had become a bridge between Rome and Florence.

It was at precisely this time that the Japanese embassy landed in Italy.

No sooner had they arrived in Livorno than Francesco I invited them to Pisa.

Father Valignano had strictly forbidden the embassy to stay anywhere other than Church facilities. But Francesco would not accept that. He lodged the boys in his own palace and even came halfway down the palace stairs to greet them, saying:

"To be the first among all the princes of Italy to receive such Japanese princes and such Christians is a special grace from Deus."

His welcome was that extravagant.

In the end, there was a welcoming ball, a welcoming falcon hunt, and more. Against the Pope's desire that they come to Rome as quickly as possible, the embassy unexpectedly remained five nights in Pisa and seven nights in Florence.

At that time, Alessandro, receiving the wishes of both the Pope in Rome and Francesco I, attended the welcoming ball in Pisa.

Now, as he looked upon the boys' faces at the funeral of Gregory XIII, he remembered them at that ball, blushing bright

red as they danced under the guidance of Duchess Bianca.

As if to hide the softening of his mouth, Alessandro spoke of how deeply Gregory XIII had devoted himself to the mission in the East.

"And the first fruits of that labor," he declared, once more presenting the boys to the audience, "are these pure-hearted Japanese youths who now mourn the death of the Pope here among us."

With that, he brought his address to a close.

It was then that a small disturbance was noticed at the entrance to the basilica.

Two ominous figures, entirely wrapped in black mourning robes called ambronche, were trying somehow to enter the church and had gotten into a quarrel with a craftsman-like man standing ahead of them.

The craftsman protested fiercely.

But the two men either did not hear him, or did not understand his words. They merely looked at one another.

Thinking he had been ignored, the man raised his voice. In anger, he tried to pull off the hood of one of them.

The man desperately held the hood in place.

But for an instant—

beneath the hood appeared the unfamiliar face of an Easterner.

The startled craftsman froze.

They were Nakaura Julião and the boy Dorado—the two who

were supposed to be resting at the monastery.

The Pope's death and the funeral had been kept from Julião.

If he learned of it, he would surely attend, no matter what strain it placed on his body.

Fortunately, because of his fever, the embassy had left him behind and gone to the funeral without him.

But from the atmosphere around him, Julião had sensed more or less what had happened.

He had sensed it, and pretended not to notice.

He wanted as much as possible to avoid troubling the others on his account.

And he knew that if he spoke to Father Mesquita, he would be opposed.

"Julião, what do you think of the feelings of Pope Gregory, who was concerned for your health to the very end? Do you truly think forcing yourself to attend the funeral in such a condition would accord with the Pope's heart?"

"I am a samurai. I must repay Pope Gregory's kindness, even at the cost of my life. Father Mesquita does not understand the heart of a samurai."

After everyone had left, Julião questioned Dorado, who had remained behind to care for him, and confirmed that the funeral was taking place.

"Dorado, please. Take me to St. Peter's. No matter what it takes, I must attend Pope Gregory's funeral. I know Father Mesquita would not understand, but you are Japanese too. You

should understand."

Dorado searched the Jesuit headquarters, now deserted because of the funeral, and found two ambronche in the sacristy—black mourning robes that covered even the face.

They had probably been prepared for use in some religious drama.

Wrapped in them, no one would know they were Japanese.

Supporting Julião, whose steps were unsteady, Dorado brought him to the funeral hall.

The entrance to St. Peter's was overflowing with people.

Dorado was determined to get Julião inside the basilica somehow.

Two black shapes, like figures of death itself, pressed desperately toward the entrance of St. Peter's.

Frightened by the sight of the ominous pair, people opened a path and hurriedly crossed themselves.

In this way, the two managed somehow to enter the basilica.

And at that very moment—

the incident occurred.

Julião hastily pulled his hood back over his head and, together with Dorado, tried to slip away.

The man reached out to seize them.

But perhaps reassured by the glimpse of the young face hidden beneath the hood—or moved by pity—the crowd began to shout:

"Let them go!"

Another voice rang out:

"What's so improper about it? Don't act so high and mighty!"

"Gregory's the one who's improper!"

"That's right! I'm glad the old Pope's dead! Let him rot in hell! Without customers, how are we supposed to live? Those church men sneak around with us in secret, and then they call us immoral!"

"Yeah, that's right…!"

What had begun with Julião quickly ignited unrest near the entrance of St. Peter's.

For a moment, it seemed as though it might erupt into a full-blown riot.

But only for a moment.

At the direction of Cardinal Alessandro, the Swiss Guards—the standing army of the papacy—were swiftly deployed throughout the basilica. Orders were given to isolate anyone who appeared to be the source of disturbance.

"Do not let the commotion grow."

"Anyone causing trouble—or attempting to incite it—must be immediately separated from the others."

Those were the instructions Alessandro had given the Swiss Guards.

Accordingly, guards were stationed along the side aisles and beside the forty-five altars throughout the basilica, ready to respond instantly to any disturbance.

Alessandro's measures proved effective.

Aside from this small incident, no riot broke out during the nine days of mourning.

The body of Gregory XIII was safely laid to rest in the crypt beneath St. Peter's.

Julião and Dorado, taken into custody by the Swiss Guards, were, through Alessandro's consideration, quietly returned to the Jesuit residence. The matter was treated as if it had never happened.

More than that—

Understanding Julião's feelings, it was officially recorded that all members of the Japanese embassy had attended the funeral of Gregory XIII.

That night, after the incident, Dorado whispered softly to Julião:

"…The people of Rome don't really believe in the Pope, do they…?"

At that same time—

The coffin of Gregory XIII was being carried into the crypt.

And in complete silence,

it passed directly before Yasuo—

who stood there, unable to move.

# 4

Though it was already nearing the latter half of April, Rome was still wrapped in a chill.

White breath rose from the line of cardinals as they made their way toward the site of the conclave.

The nine days of funeral rites had come to an end, and now the conclave—the assembly to elect a new Pope—was about to begin.

The Sistine Chapel, where it would be held, was to be sealed until a new Pope was chosen. No one would be permitted to enter or leave.

Within those walls, the highest-ranking clergy of the Church would gather, and through a vote among the cardinals, the next Pope would be decided.

During this time, the Vatican would transform—from a place of prayer into a stage of political maneuvering—where the ambitions of nations and the personal desires of individuals collided, each seeking to see their own candidate elevated to the papacy.

On this day, Cardinal Alessandro was among those entering the conclave.

Just as he approached the entrance, an elderly cardinal ahead of him began to cough violently and collapsed to his knees before the door.

Alessandro stepped forward, placing a hand on the man's back.

"Your Eminence Felice, steady yourself. It is too soon for you to die."

The old man turned toward him, his voice strained.

"Ah… Alessandro… your kindness is appreciated. But as you can see, I may be called at any moment. I am… prepared."

It seemed even these few words exhausted him, and he was seized once more by coughing.

All forty-two cardinals with voting rights witnessed the scene.

Each of them thought the same thing:

He may collapse at any moment… he may even cough up blood and die here.

And at the same time, another thought took root in their minds.

The death of Gregory XIII had come too suddenly.

The audience with the Japanese boys—the whole of Rome had been alive with excitement. The Pope had rejoiced in that brilliance, that brightness, as if he alone were basking in it.

And yet—he had died so abruptly.

The ambitions of nations, the calculations of individuals—all of it required a little more time, a little more adjustment, before it could take shape.

And so, they all thought:

Felice will not live long. He has no strong political color, no powerful backing. He is the perfect choice to buy time…

While the conclave was underway, St. Peter's Square overflowed with people awaiting the birth of a new Pope.

There were the same ambitions and calculations that filled the chamber within, along with a certain irresponsible curiosity tinged with malice—and, of course, faith, in all its varied forms.

Among the crowd were the Japanese boys, led by Father Mesquita.

Mesquita thought:

In the worst case, the result of this election could undo everything the Jesuits have worked for.

There were already strong criticisms of the Jesuits' monopoly over missionary work in the East.

The Franciscans and Dominicans, in particular, often stood in opposition to the Jesuits over missionary rights.

If a member of one of those orders were to be elected Pope, it was certain that cracks would appear in the Jesuits' exclusive control over the mission in Japan.

But such concerns were far from the minds of the boys.

How will the Pope be chosen?

What is it like inside the chapel?

What kind of person will become the next Pope?

Their hearts were filled with simple curiosity.

Pressed by their questioning eyes, Father Mesquita sighed and began to explain:

"In the papal election, each cardinal has one vote. Each writes

the name of his choice on a ballot and places it into a vessel set at the front of the chamber. Voting continues until one candidate receives a two-thirds majority. After each round, the ballots are burned in a stove.

"If no decision is reached, black smoke will appear. When a new Pope has been chosen—white smoke. You see over there…"

He pointed.

"That opening allows the smoke to be released."

As they followed the direction of his finger, a voice suddenly spoke:

"Is Cardinal Alessandro in there as well?"

It was Julião.

During the Pope's funeral, when Julião had secretly attended despite his illness, it had been Alessandro who had arranged for him to be quietly returned to the Jesuit residence—making sure no one would discover him.

Though Julião's presence could have sparked unrest, Alessandro had neither reproached him nor exposed the matter. He had simply placed a robe over his trembling, feverish body and said, "Take care of yourself."

"Of course," Mesquita replied. "Cardinal Alessandro is there as well."

"I hope Cardinal Alessandro becomes the new Pope…"

"Julião… that is for God to decide."

At that moment, a voice called out:

"Father Mesquita! Father Mesquita!"

A monk approached, pushing through the crowd, holding a letter.

"Father Mesquita—this is from Loyola in Lisbon! From Lisbon!"

The letter had been sent from the São Roque monastery in Lisbon by a Japanese brother named Loyola.

He had traveled to Europe with the embassy, but his role had been different from that of the boys.

He had remained in Lisbon to learn the art of printing—and to select a printing press to be brought back to Japan.

Mesquita broke the seal.

Inside was a letter printed in Romanized Japanese—evidence of Loyola's progress in mastering printing.

It was likely a sample, printed for practice.

"This was printed by Loyola," Mesquita said, spreading it out for all to see.

The boys stared at it in amazement.

They had learned Roman letters at the seminary in Arima—but here was one of their own, printing his thoughts in type.

"What does it say?" one of them asked.

"Martinho, try reading it."

Mesquita handed the letter to Hara Martinho.

As he read, Martinho's eyes began to shine.

"What does it say? Tell us!"

"It looks like they've found a way to obtain a printing press," Martinho said. "According to the letter, a printer in Lisbon who had failed in business fled, leaving behind his equipment. They can purchase it at a low price—two presses, and even three sets of type."

"Already?"

"Not yet… There are legal procedures to settle. But it says that by the time we return to Lisbon, everything should be arranged…"

"Let me see that!"

Just as Chijiwa Miguel reached for the letter—

A commotion rose from the crowd.

"White smoke!"

"White smoke is rising!"

"The new Pope has been chosen!"

It was when Felice—later Sixtus V—was still only twenty-two.

He was walking along a rural road in Sicily in a line with other Franciscan friars when a man approached from the opposite direction.

The man pushed his way through the line and, to Felice's astonishment, knelt before him.

"You are Felice Peretti da Montalto, born near the village of Ancona, once a shepherd…"

Felice assumed the man must be someone from his hometown,

someone who knew him from his childhood.

"Who might you be? Whoever you are, please—there is no need to kneel before a young friar like myself."

"No… before Your Holiness, I cannot remain standing. You are destined, in time, to ascend to the throne of the Roman Pontiff…"

"……"

"It is only natural that you doubt me. My name is Michel de Nostredame. In time, my name too will reach Your Holiness."

With that, the man bowed respectfully and departed.

It was during the period when Nostradamus, ignoring a summons from the Inquisition in Toulouse, was wandering from France into Italy.

This was the first—and last—meeting between Nostradamus and Sixtus.

And yet, from that day on, a great ambition was lit within Felice's heart.

Each time that ambition stirred, the face of Nostradamus would rise before him.

Perhaps, through that single prophecy, Nostradamus had taken up residence within Felice's soul.

And now—

That ambition had been fulfilled.

At the same time, the name of Nostradamus had begun to

spread throughout the world, as a prophet favored by Catherine de' Medici, who had married into the French court from the Medici family.

The coronation had passed without incident.

Today, the Japanese boys were to come and offer their farewell.

Sixtus thought:

It is because I was chosen by God that I have become Pope. It is not because of that man's prophecy.

God required me. That is why I have ascended to the throne of Rome. I have nothing to do with Nostradamus—that man who reeks of heresy.

I was chosen by God.

God commands me to work—to accomplish what only I can accomplish. God has need of me…

"Your Holiness."

"……"

"Your Holiness, the Japanese envoys have arrived to offer their farewell."

The words of the chamberlain brought Sixtus's thoughts to an end.

# 5

Have you ever known Rome's other face?

Beyond what we know—

as the holy center of Catholicism,

as a city of ancient Roman ruins symbolized by the Colosseum,

or as a destination for fashion and shopping—

Rome harbors, beneath its surface, an astonishing hidden world.

Take, for example, the church famous from Roman Holiday—the Bocca della Verità, the "Mouth of Truth."

Embedded in the wall of its portico is what is believed to be a manhole cover from around the 4th century BCE. The face carved into it is said to bite off the hand of anyone who tells a lie. In the Middle Ages, it was even used to test the fidelity of husbands and wives.

The church's formal name is Santa Maria in Cosmedin. Beneath it spreads an underground complex of ancient Roman ruins.

These ruins were not originally underground. Rather, new cities were built atop old ones, layering the passage of time into physical strata.

At the Basilica of San Clemente, west of the Colosseum, the underground structure is said to consist of three levels. And as one descends, one travels backward in time.

It is almost like a department store of history—

"On Basement Level Two, we have the remains of a Mithraic

temple and ancient dwellings.

On Basement Level Three, the ruins of Rome burned by Emperor Nero…"

Something like that.

Throughout Rome, such subterranean worlds—unknown to most of us—extend in countless directions. Some are open to the public, yet they are not typically introduced in tourist guides, nor is their full extent understood.

It is said that the construction of subways in Rome is hindered for this very reason—that excavations often encounter unexpected ruins.

Rome's underground labyrinth—

perhaps it is not merely a labyrinth of space,

but a labyrinth of time.

And perhaps the place Yasuo had wandered into…

was such a labyrinth of time.

Freed at last from his paralysis, Yasuo suddenly broke into a blind run.

(What was that just now?)

While he had been unable to move, images—like fragments blurred by mosaic—had jerked awkwardly through his mind.

A procession carrying a coffin into the underground crypt.

Figures who seemed to be clergy, seated face to face at tables lined along both sides.

The faces of children—faces he somehow knew to be Japanese, though he could not see them clearly.

Such images flashed across his mind, disconnected, without any apparent relation.

A senseless fear pressed down upon him.

Yet his body had been frozen, unable to flee.

And so, the moment the paralysis lifted, he had run—without thinking.

He had no idea how long he had been running.

Suddenly, he stumbled.

He struck a low partition-like wall and tumbled over to the other side.

That was when he came back to himself.

(Calm down. If I keep running blindly in this darkness, there's no telling where I'll end up…)

For a while, he sat there without moving.

Then he remembered—

He had a penlight with him for work.

He reached into his breast pocket—

(It's gone…! Where did it go?)

He must have dropped it when he fell.

Groping around in the darkness, he searched desperately, but could not find it.

His rising panic threatened to overtake him again—

when his hand touched something small and cold.

He had never known a penlight to seem so bright.

And yet, the world illuminated by its beam was nothing like the brightly arranged underground passage meant for tourists.

It had changed completely.

It was a closed space, like a dungeon.

In front of him, a decaying wooden door.

To the right, a stone staircase leading upward.

He climbed it.

At the top, a narrow stone-paved chamber opened before him. The staircase turned sharply at a right angle and continued upward.

He had no idea how he had fallen into such a place. It made no sense.

But if he could just climb those stairs, perhaps he could reach the surface.

With that hope, he ascended.

At the top—

another heavy wooden door blocked his way.

He pushed it.

He pulled it.

He pounded on it.

He shouted.

The door did not budge.

There was no sound.

Silence.

No—

that wasn't quite true.

Listening carefully, he could hear—

the faint sound of flowing water.

Drawn by that sound, Yasuo descended once more to the first chamber.

The sound came from beyond the rotting wooden door.

He approached it.

There was no handle.

It did not seem meant to be opened from this side.

He searched for a gap—somewhere he could insert his fingers—

…and found one.

At the bottom corner, the wood had rotted away.

He slipped his hand inside, hooked his fingers, and pulled.

With more force—

Crack!

The door suddenly gave way inward.

The sound of water grew louder.

It was likely a sewer.

Alongside the flowing water ran a narrow path—barely wide enough for one person to pass.

Hesitantly, Yasuo began to walk along it—
following the direction of the current.

He felt certain the water flowed toward the Tiber River.
And for some reason—
he had the sense that just before reaching the river,
he would be able to return to the surface.

Upon his accession, Sixtus granted an audience to the Japanese envoys and, on that occasion, promised full support for the Church in Japan.

With this, the concerns of Acquaviva, Superior General of the Jesuits, and Father Mesquita were, at last, partly eased.

The four envoys were granted Roman citizenship, and that very afternoon, a ceremony was held in which they received decorations from the Pope.

On the day before their departure from Rome, they were granted a final audience to take their leave.

Sixtus entrusted them with gifts—finely crafted swords adorned with gold and silver, velvet hats, and other offerings—along with formal letters addressed to the Christian daimyō of Kyushu: Ōtomo, Arima, and Ōmura.

Furthermore, he pledged financial support to the churches and seminaries in Japan—six thousand cruzados annually for a period of twenty years.

At last, as the moment of parting approached, Itō Mancio, representing the boys, expressed their gratitude for the Pope's many kindnesses.

Then he spoke of the printing press they were to bring back from Lisbon.

"Your Holiness, thanks to your support, we believe we will be able to obtain a printing press. One of our companions has already learned the art of printing in Lisbon. With this, we hope to spread the Word of God throughout Japan. Someday, we wish to convey the Holy Scriptures—the life of Our Lord—in our own language."

Those words struck Sixtus like a sudden shock.

Not long before, the Scriptures had not been permitted to be translated into any language other than Latin.

Indeed, even copying the Bible had been forbidden to all but the clergy.

But through the Reformation, Luther and others had translated the Bible into German and published it.

A Bible no longer confined to Latin—a Bible written in the language of the people.

This translation had not only made the Scriptures accessible to all, but had also contributed to the very formation of the German language itself.

In contrast, the Catholic Latin Bible—the Vulgate—had suffered from accumulated copying errors over time, mistakes and omissions that had never been fully corrected.

With the rise of Protestantism, which possessed its own revised editions of Scripture, it had become an urgent necessity for the Catholic Church as well to produce a reliable version of the Vulgate.

Yet resistance remained strong against translation into other languages.

Listening to the dreams of the Japanese boys—of printing, of spreading the Word—Sixtus felt as though he had heard the voice of God.

In their words, he glimpsed what might be his own mission.

"You say you wish to render the Word of God into the language of Japan—

A noble aspiration.

To spread the Word of God throughout the world, it may not be right to confine it forever to the realm of Latin alone.

Yet for that very reason, we must now establish a truly worthy Latin Bible as its foundation.

To leave behind a perfect Scripture—that, I believe, is the work entrusted to me.

You, boys of Japan, have made me aware of that mission."

So saying, Sixtus embraced each of the boys in turn, and promised that he would complete a worthy and definitive Bible.

Thus, the embassy departed from Rome.

From that time on, Sixtus worked with relentless intensity.

As if driving away some shadow within himself, he labored without rest.

(I was chosen by God. Not by Nostradamus—)

During his five-year pontificate, Sixtus accomplished what was said to be the work of fifty years.

He completed the dome of St. Peter's Basilica.

He employed hundreds of laborers to move the obelisk to its present position in St. Peter's Square.

He established the Vatican Library.

He constructed an aqueduct stretching twenty miles, crossing valleys and hills, to supply water to Rome.

Among all these achievements, his greatest work was the revision of the Vulgate—the Latin Bible upon which the Church relied.

Originally the labor of Jerome in the fourth century, the Vulgate had, over time, accumulated countless errors through repeated copying.

Even with the advent of printing, errors only multiplied with each new edition.

With the rise of the Reformation, Protestants had produced their own revised Bibles.

For the Catholic Church, the creation of a trustworthy Vulgate had become a matter of utmost urgency.

Sixtus attempted to undertake this work almost alone.

In the third year of his pontificate, dissatisfied with the final draft submitted by scholars, he issued a papal decree of three hundred words, dismissing them entirely.

"The only person fit to decide matters concerning the Scriptures upon which the Church depends is the Pope—that is, myself."

In short, rejecting the scholars' work, Sixtus devoted himself almost single-handedly to the task.

Within just eight months, he completed a revised edition.

Yet when he received the first proofs of the folio edition, he was appalled.

There were more errors than before.

Worse still, through what was likely oversight, the arrangement of chapters and verses had been completely omitted.

To avoid further delay, Sixtus himself undertook the corrections.

He wrote corrections on small slips of paper in ink and pasted them over the misprints.

Printers were forced into a whirlwind of labor, working day and night to keep up with the constant revisions.

Six more months passed before the work finally reached completion.

The great papal bull of Sixtus V declared:

"By the fullness of apostolic authority, we decree and proclaim: this edition—approved by the authority granted to us by the Lord—must be accepted as true and legitimate, and must serve without doubt as the foundation in all public and private disputation, preaching, and interpretation."

Four months after the completion of the Bible, on August 27, 1590, Sixtus passed from this world, accompanied by the tolling bells of the Capitoline Hill.

It was one month after the members of the Tenshō Embassy—no longer boys, perhaps—had returned to Nagasaki.

That night, it is said, the people of Rome lay awake through a long night, unable to sleep, as a violent storm suddenly swept through the city.

A fitting end—

for the Pope known as the "Holy Whirlwind."

# Chapter 2
# The Disappeared Sixtus Bible

## 6

Nagasaki, 1645

Kyūsuke found it strange.

A full month had passed since he had been arrested, and yet he had barely been questioned. Immediately after his arrest, he had been brought before the fumie, the image to be stepped on—but he had not actually been forced to step on it.

It had all begun with the arrest of a thief in Nagasaki.

Perhaps resigned to his fate, the man began obediently confessing the many thefts he had committed over the past four years. His memory was astonishingly clear. He remembered in detail where he had stolen what, so precisely that even the officials questioning him were impressed.

Among those memories was one involving a strange book stolen from a shop that sold Nanban sweets.

He had found a wrapped bundle hidden in the attic and, thinking it must be some treasure with a story behind it, carried it away. But when he opened it, he found only a thick book filled with Nanban letters.

"That thing had to belong to one of those Nanban padres. Stealing such a thing—that was where everything went wrong."

Fearing the magic of the padres and not knowing what to do with it, the man had thrown it away at Suwa Shrine. He described the whole affair in minute detail.

Because of this confession, the investigation reached the Nanban confectionery shop Kazusa, where the man had stolen the book. Its owner, Kyūsuke, and his wife, Chiyo, were arrested on suspicion of being Christians.

In the courtyard of judgment, a copper plate was placed before Kyūsuke and his wife, both bound tightly with rope.

Engraved upon it was the image of Mary holding the infant Jesus.

At that moment, Kyūsuke braced himself.

This is the end. I no longer need to run or hide.

If I cannot step on the holy image, there is no telling what harsh questioning awaits me. I do not know how much I can endure, but together with my wife, I will hold out as long as I can…

That was what he thought.

And yet, strangely, he was not forced to step on the image that day.

Instead, he and his wife were simply taken to prison.

Not to the prison compound at Sakuramachi, but to a tatami-floored confinement room inside the Tateyama Office.

At first, Kyūsuke assumed they were being kept apart to

prevent them from preaching to other prisoners. But more than a month had passed since then, and nothing had changed.

No official came to question them.

Apart from the meals brought twice a day, morning and evening, no one had any contact with them at all.

Even Kyūsuke could feel the tension in his own heart gradually loosening.

Could our arrest itself have been some kind of mistake…?

But his wife said:

"The officials are waiting for our hearts to grow careless. They mean to lull us into ease, then suddenly subject us to severe questioning. My husband, whatever happens, you must not abandon the faith. Let us endure together as husband and wife, and go together to Paraíso."

Whenever she spoke of such things, her tone became unusually stern.

When it came to making Nanban sweets, there was no one in Nagasaki who surpassed Kyūsuke.

While serving in the household of Murayama Tōan, the Nagasaki magistrate, he had learned the making of castella almost as a pastime from Tōan himself.

Murayama Tōan was a man who, through his natural wit and his skill in making Nanban sweets—what people called castella—had gained the favor of Hideyoshi during the campaign at Hizen Nagoya, eventually securing the position of magistrate over

Nagasaki's outer town.

Kyūsuke received instruction from this Tōan, and thanks to his own deft hands, quickly became skilled in the making of Nanban confections.

From then on, Tōan valued him highly, and through Tōan's patronage, Kyūsuke was even able to establish his own shop.

At that time, Tōan had said, "A man cannot set up a household without a wife," and introduced him to the woman who was now his wife.

Her name was Chiyo. Her baptismal name was Catarina.

The believers who admired her had come to call her "Lady Catarina, Lady Catarina."

But Kyūsuke found that somehow embarrassing. Even now, he called her only Chiyo, and he disliked being called by his own baptismal name, Domingo.

Her father was Gotō Sōin, a relative of the Gotō family, one of the prominent town elder families.

In the days when Christianity flourished, he had mastered the printing techniques brought from overseas and opened a Christian printing house in Nagasaki.

At that time, from the magistrate of Nagasaki's outer town to the elders of the inner town, nearly the whole city was Christian. Precisely because of that, a man involved in printing Christian books was treated with special respect.

Moreover, Sōin had succeeded, through Japanese hands,

in setting Japanese into movable type—something the Jesuit missionaries had abandoned because of its complexity.

It was only natural that all Nagasaki should look upon him with admiration.

His daughter Chiyo had been familiar with Christianity from early childhood. She could recite by heart the Japanese editions of the Doctrina Christiana and Santos no Gosagyō.

For that reason, after the prohibition of Christianity, and partly at the urging of a certain Japanese padre, she did not choose martyrdom. Instead, she and her husband lived secretly as hidden believers, quietly teaching the faith.

Kyūsuke had married such a woman.

She came from the distinguished Gotō family, and was beautiful enough that it seemed a waste for her to remain merely the wife of a confectioner.

Even now, though she was past fifty, she retained a youthful air and showed almost no trace of ordinary domestic life.

She did not rely on her family name, and in daily life she was extremely modest.

But when it came to the Christian faith, she became like another person.

On that matter, even Kyūsuke could not oppose her.

Indeed, as Chiyo said, since Lord Inoue Chikugo-no-kami had become the official in charge of religious investigation, Christians

were no longer subjected to the kind of punishments that made one avert one's eyes.

Even when padres were captured, the magistrate's office would merely confine them and leave them more or less to themselves.

The padres, who had once prepared themselves for martyrdom, gradually let down their guard and even began to think, Perhaps we may be saved after all.

Then, if they were tortured at just such a moment, human beings were weak. Even a little torment could break them.

As Chiyo said, perhaps that was precisely why the two of them were being left alone.

When it came to Christians, the highest priority Lord Inoue Chikugo-no-kami had given the Nagasaki magistrate's office was this:

Do not create martyrs.

I must keep that in mind, Kyūsuke thought.

Then one day, an official brought the two of them a change of clothes.

"Later, someone will come for you. Change into these and be ready."

Before long, dressed in ordinary town clothes, the two were taken from the cell.

Led by officials, they exited through the rear gate of the magistrate's office and were brought to a nearby temple called Saishōji.

The official handed them over to a young monk—and then,

incredibly, returned to the magistrate's office.

The monk, too, seemed unable to grasp the situation. Looking bewildered, he led the two of them to the temple kitchen quarters.

"Please wait here for a while. Lord Ryōhaku will speak with you later."

With that, he left them there.

## 7

"It has been a long time."

The man sat quietly before the two of them, looked at Chiyo, and bowed deeply.

Chiyo peered at his face as he raised his head.

He must have been nearly seventy. His hair, now completely white, was tied behind him. He looked terribly aged, yet she recognized the gentle eyes.

The drawn scar remaining at his right temple spoke of the torture he had once endured—the torture known as ana-tsurushi, "suspension in the pit."

In this torture, the body was bound tightly round and round, then suspended upside down into a pit filled with filth. A cut was made at the temple or behind the ear so that blood would not pool in the head and kill the victim too quickly.

It was a method devised by Inoue Chikugo-no-kami to make Christians apostatize.

Once subjected to it, all the blood in the body rushed to the head. Consciousness gradually grew clouded, and before long the pain felt as if the skull itself would split open.

When the victim's mind became confused and normal judgment was no longer possible, those above the pit would strike gongs and make a great noise, shouting:

"Fall!"

"Fall!"

"No one has ever endured this torture without falling!"

"Even if you fall, no one will call you a coward."

"Shake your body, and we'll pull you up. All you have to do is shake. That will be the sign that you have fallen!"

"Shake! Shake!"

"Fall! Fall!"

"Lord Thomas…?"

At that voice, the hideous memory was swept away, and Ryōhaku suddenly came back to himself.

Ever since then, day and night, images of that suspension in the pit would rise before him and torment him.

"Yes," he said. "There was a time when I was called by that name. But now I am known as Araki Ryōhaku."

"Lord Ryōhaku…?"

"Indeed. Araki Ryōhaku—the fallen padre."

Thirty years earlier, it had been the Japanese missionary Thomas Araki who had urged Chiyo to step on the image, if only in form.

"Death is not the only way to remain faithful to the teaching," he had told her. "Surely there is something to be done by living."

From that moment, Chiyo's suffering had begun.

She had committed to memory several of the Christian books printed by her father and the people of the college:

Dochirina Kirishitan—the catechism.

Santos no Gosagyō.

Gia do Pecador—The Guide for Sinners.

Contemptus Mundi—The Contempt of the World.

If I die, she had thought, then along with these books, the teaching of Christ will disappear from Japan. Those who live as hidden believers need the teachings I have memorized.

That thought had sustained her.

But had she not, in truth, merely wanted to preserve her own life?

Had she not simply disguised that fear with the mission of living on to pass down the faith?

She had no idea how deeply that thought had tormented her.

When she was arrested, she had thought, At last I will be released from this suffering.

And so, this time, she had firmly resolved never to fall.

Chiyo's expression hardened despite herself.

"Lord Thomas, you advised me to live and pass on the

teaching. You told me that dying was not the only path of faith. What path, then, did you yourself find?"

"……"

"Chiyo," Kyūsuke said hastily, trying to restrain her, "Lord Ryōhaku chose his own path. It is not for us to speak of it."

Before Chiyo and Kyūsuke, Ryōhaku silently placed a heavy parcel wrapped in oiled paper.

Chiyo looked at him in surprise.

Ryōhaku gave a long sigh and quietly began to unwrap it.

Layer after layer of oiled paper was removed.

Inside appeared a single volume marked in large letters:

BIBLIA SACRA

It was the Latin Bible that had been found in the attic of Kyūsuke's shop.

"Lady Chiyo," Ryōhaku said, "do you remember? Forty-seven years ago, one of the purposes for which I crossed to Rome was to bring this Sixtus Bible back to Japan."

The two Gutenberg printing presses brought back from Europe by the boys of the Tenshō Embassy.

At first, they were installed at the college in Kazusa, and later at the college in Amakusa.

With these presses, the teachings of Christ translated into Japanese were sent out into the world as books printed in roman letters. Japanese classics such as The Tale of the Heike and Taiheiki were also printed, so that the padres might use them in

learning Japanese.

Before long, among the teachers of the college and the Japanese students involved in printing, a movement arose—not merely to print in roman letters, but to make movable type out of Japanese characters themselves.

The Portuguese and Italian missionaries warned that, because of the complexity of the Japanese language, setting it in type would be impossible.

But the Japanese staff and students of the college threw themselves into the project with desperate energy.

The members of the embassy who had brought back the presses—especially Hara Martinho, Nakaura Julião, and Dorado, who had learned metal typecasting in Rome—earnestly argued for the importance of conveying the Word of God in Japanese.

At the center of this work was Chiyo's father, Gotō Sōin. Fascinated by the beauty of Western printed books, he went regularly to the college and devoted himself body and soul to mastering and developing the technique.

Among the students who followed him was Thomas Araki.

Chiyo's older brother, Miguel, was there as well.

And not only students: there were also Fabian Fucan, the teacher of Japanese language and literature, and the Portuguese brother Pereira.

Pereira loved Thomas more than anyone.

To Thomas, though Pereira was only just past fifty, he looked

like a man over seventy.

He was said to speak Japanese more skillfully than most Japanese. As a child, he had been one of the orphans sent from the foundling home in Lisbon to India, to assist the padres working in the missions of the East.

While sorting printed sheets, Pereira often told Thomas about those days.

At the port of Lisbon, the orphans who remained behind would stand in a line to see off those departing for India. They would play what few instruments they had and briefly mourn their separation.

Those who sent them off, and those who were sent away, all knew they would never meet again.

They knew it, and yet they whispered to one another in secret:

"Come back safely."

Pereira often told Thomas, "Even now, I can see that scene clearly before my eyes."

Whenever he spoke of it, his eyes would fill with tears.

Then suddenly he would say:

"No, no. We have no time for this, Thomas. Latin! You must learn Latin. You must come to speak Latin better than anyone in Japan—no, better than anyone in the world."

And so, just as suddenly, a private Latin lesson would begin.

While they picked type.

While they sorted printed sheets.

The reason Thomas knew Latin better than any of his

companions was because of Pereira's instruction.

And as a result, Thomas was chosen to be sent to Rome, partly for the purpose of collecting source texts for Japanese translations.

While they sought to create movable type for Japanese, they were also searching for original texts to translate into Japanese.

First among those texts was, of course, the Bible.

Through Hara Martinho and Nakaura Julião, they knew that a complete revision of the Vulgate—the Latin Bible—was being carried out in Rome.

The Bible of Sixtus.

They would translate it into Japanese and publish it using type made by Japanese hands.

Their dream grew and grew.

But the Society of Jesus itself was not merely reluctant about this idea. It was almost opposed to it.

The age of Xavier and Valignano—who had praised and highly valued the abilities of the Japanese—was drawing to a close.

Rather, the view that Japanese people were untrustworthy barbarians was becoming mainstream within the Jesuits.

Japanese men, it was said, were better suited to serve the Church as irmãos, lay brothers or helpers, rather than as missionaries.

They were ambitious, and they used the teaching of Christ for their own advancement. That was why they wanted to become missionaries. They could not understand the noble teachings of Christ. If the deeper mysteries were taught to them, their

ambition would lead them to distort Christianity and create another sect.

This was an extreme view.

And it is true that there were also Italian missionaries who showed a more favorable attitude toward the Japanese.

Yet it was also true that the Jesuit mission in Japan itself was marked by a harsh climate toward Japanese members. Dissatisfaction among Japanese members was constant, and friction existed between Portuguese members and Japanese members.

Thus, the one who helped support their dream was not the Jesuits, but one wealthy Japanese believer—a Nagasaki red-seal ship merchant named Suetsugu Kōzen.

On condition that they gather information in Europe and provide it to him, he offered to send private students to Rome at the expense of the Suetsugu family, not the Society of Jesus.

"I and your elder brother Miguel were chosen as students to be sent to Rome," Ryōhaku said. "I was chosen because I was proficient in Latin. Miguel was chosen because he had learned printing from your father.

"Lord Nakaura Julião told me: 'Whatever happens, bring back the Bible of Pope Sixtus to Japan.'"

"…Could it be," Kyūsuke said, speaking for the first time in a while, "that though we have kept it all this time without knowing what it was, this is that very Bible?"

"Yes. One of the purposes for which I and Lady Chiyo's

brother crossed to Rome was to bring back this Sixtus Bible.

"But that also meant, whether we wished it or not, facing the reality of the Christian world."

"…Lord Thomas, do you intend to blame the Christian world for your own weakness? Was your faith so shallow that it could be shaken by such things?"

Chiyo's words suddenly turned severe.

Then, after a long silence, a passage from the catechism she had carried in memory for so many years—Dochirina Kirishitan—began to spill from her lips with tears.

"'The true Son of Deus Pater, the Son of God, within the noble womb of the Virgin Maria, received true flesh, not unlike our own flesh, and a true anima—soul—and became true man. Yet in His being as Deus, He did not change, but remained always the same Deus. He who was born of this Virgin Santa Maria is called Jesus Christ. And this birth was not brought about by the work of man, but was accomplished solely by the wondrous power of Spiritus Santo, the Holy Spirit. Therefore we say that He was conceived by Spiritus Santo…"

The birth of Jesus, both Son of God and Son of Man, was the foundation of Christianity's unique doctrine of the Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

To hold this not as an event of the past, but as a present guide and the foundation of one's own life—that was where Christian faith began.

It meant accepting a worldview and a sense of time that

placed the birth of Christ at year zero, and moved through His martyrdom and resurrection toward the Last Judgment.

To establish this thought, doctrine transmitted through words was necessary.

So too were rituals: the Nativity, Christmas; the Resurrection, Easter; and the sacraments of baptism and confession.

Thomas—no, Ryōhaku—listened to Chiyo's voice and thought of his mother.

He thought of the church in Takatsuki where she had taken him.

And he wondered what Christianity had truly been for him.

## 8

Thomas had been a Christian from the moment he was born.

His father, Araki Tadamichi, served under Araki Murashige, who ruled Settsu Province. Though they shared the Araki name, they were not related by blood. Originally bearing the name Ikeda, Thomas's grandfather, Kyūzaemon, had been appointed a senior retainer at Arioka Castle by Murashige. At that time, he was granted the Araki surname. Yet despite his standing as the foremost among the twenty-one retainers of the Ikeda family, his gentle and honest nature spared him the jealousy of long-serving retainers.

Thomas's father Tadamichi was said to have been born in his

youth to a farmer's daughter of the Ikeda lands.

Tadamichi became a Christian under the influence of Takayama Ukon, lord of Takatsuki Castle, who also served under the Araki clan.

Although of similar age, Tadamichi revered Ukon as his teacher in the art of tea, praised him as a master of castle construction, and held deep respect for his character—even if he sometimes found Ukon's strict purity somewhat burdensome.

It was Ukon who invited not only Tadamichi but also his wife Tokiko to attend his own marriage ceremony.

His bride was Justa, the sister of Furuta Oribe.

The match had been arranged through Araki Murashige at the recommendation of Oda Nobunaga—perhaps with a faint scent of political strategy—but above all, it seems that Justa's devout Christianity had moved Ukon's heart.

The sacrament of marriage was to be held in the newly completed church at Takatsuki.

At that time, many churches were simply adapted from existing shrines or Buddhist temples.

In contrast, the Takatsuki church was modest in scale, yet a fully realized structure, complete with a residence for priests, built through the devoted efforts of Ukon and his father, Hida-no-kami.

Yet Tadamichi found himself more interested in the castle

Ukon had reconstructed.

Takatsuki Castle had been built upon a low hill known as Kumejiyama—a site difficult to defend, almost like a flatland castle.

Ukon had overcome this weakness by digging deep and wide moats. Not only that, he had surrounded the inner and outer moats with yet another layer, transforming the castle into something like an island floating upon a lake.

People tended to think that, because of Ukon's association with Christianity, such techniques must have come from foreign lands.

In truth, however, Ukon had learned these methods from Kamiizumi Hidetsuna during his stay in Sakai.

Such misunderstandings always followed Ukon.

Many approached him with hidden motives—believing that through him they might gain access to foreign technology, goods, or even assistance from overseas.

Araki Murashige himself, and even Oda Nobunaga, were no exceptions.

And even Tadamichi, who regarded Ukon as both friend and teacher, could not entirely deny that such thoughts existed in his own mind.

Tadamichi acknowledged that the teachings of Christianity "made sense."

Yet he had no intention of becoming a Christian himself.

Above all, he could not accept the doctrine of monogamy—

that one man must have only one wife, and that marriage could never be dissolved.

This, he believed, did not suit Japan.

Not merely for moral reasons, but because in that age, the continuation of one's lineage had to take precedence over all else—even politically.

"The teachings of Christ, as Ukon presents them, are too pure," he would say. "A man like me could never approach them."

Yet upon visiting Takatsuki, that conviction changed.

It was not logic.

It was not philosophy.

Rather, he found himself enveloped by colors and sounds unlike anything he had ever seen or heard—foreign, vibrant—and it was this that drew him into Christianity.

At the end of 1574 (Tenshō 2), the sacrament of marriage between Ukon and Justa was solemnly performed at the Takatsuki church.

The newly built altar.

The vivid crimson mantle of Father Organtino.

The pure white bridal robe worn by Justa.

The dignified figure of Ukon in his black habit.

The sound of the organ.

Over it, the rising hymn.

And then, the clear Latin voice of Father Organtino echoing throughout the hall…

For Tadamichi and his wife, as for all those present, it was their first experience of a Christian wedding.

Though they could not understand the Latin, the simplicity and solemnity moved them deeply.

Especially for the women—who had long been treated as instruments of political marriage—the vision of husband and wife presented by Christianity must have been something they had always longed for.

As if swept away by that atmosphere, Tadamichi and his wife became Christians.

It was one month after Ukon's wedding.

And half a year later, the long-awaited son was born to them.

He was baptized at the Takatsuki church.

His baptismal name was Thomas.

His godfather was Justo Takayama Ukon.

And the one who performed the baptism was Father Organtino, the Italian priest who would later become rector of the Azuchi seminary.

From the moment of his conversion, everything seemed to proceed smoothly for Tadamichi.

Oda Nobunaga treated Christianity with favor.

Murashige, too, extended protection to Christians and placed great trust in Tadamichi after his conversion.

In Murashige's case, this was not merely because he saw value

in Christianity, but also because he faced the urgent need to keep Takayama Ukon under control.

Thus, Tadamichi was frequently sent as a messenger to Ukon in Takatsuki.

For Tadamichi, who revered Ukon as both friend and teacher, this was a welcome duty.

He never realized the deeper intention hidden behind Murashige's orders.

Murashige had already begun to harbor thoughts of rebellion against Nobunaga.

In the autumn of 1578 (Tenshō 6), those thoughts took concrete form.

Murashige suddenly joined forces with the Ishiyama Honganji and the Mōri clan, and raised the banner of rebellion against Nobunaga.

Thomas was just three years old.

Early the next morning, Kyūzaemon and his men assembled at the main gate.

They were to depart as envoys to Amagasaki Castle, bearing a proposal for surrender.

It is said their number reached three hundred.

Around them gathered the families who had come to see them off.

Standing beside Kyūzaemon, Tadamichi noticed his young

half-brother, Jinen, being led there by his nurse.

Tadamichi quietly glanced at his father's profile.

He knew well how dearly Kyūzaemon loved that small child.

And yet, his father was now about to depart, leaving that beloved son behind.

If it had been possible, Kyūzaemon would surely have taken the child with him.

But considering the families of the retainers who were being left behind as hostages, such a thing could never be done.

As he thought of his father's feelings, something like guilt stirred within Tadamichi.

(Have Tokiko and Thomas safely escaped the castle…?)

Soon, the great gate opened.

The company led by Kyūzaemon departed in orderly ranks toward Amagasaki.

As they set out, Kyūzaemon's gaze met the sleepy eyes of little Jinen.

He said nothing.

Turning his face away, filled with anguish, he walked on—

as though cutting off all lingering attachment.

Outside, the world was eerily silent.

No gunfire.

No battle cries.

No desperate shouts of men facing death.

Only the relentless gaze of both friend and foe followed the departing company.

And behind Arioka Castle, three figures drifted down the Inagawa River in a small boat.

In the center sat Tokiko, holding Thomas in her arms.

Behind her sat an old warrior in armor, clutching his sword.

At the bow stood a young warrior in plain clothes, guiding the boat with a pole.

Kyūzaemon's company eventually reached Amagasaki Castle.

But Murashige refused to appear.

Not only did he shut the gates and refuse to meet them—

he suddenly ordered gunfire upon the envoys who persisted in urging surrender.

There was nothing left but to flee.

Kyūzaemon's company scattered like frightened spiders.

Even the Oda forces watching nearby could not immediately grasp what had happened.

In an instant, the three hundred men disappeared in all directions.

Afterward, some fled to Awaji Island, others to Mount Kōya.

It is said that not a single man—save one—returned to Arioka Castle.

There is even a theory that this dramatic escape had been staged in advance by Murashige and Kyūzaemon—to preserve the key members of the Araki clan until reinforcements from the Mōri might arrive.

But the price was terrible.

Nobunaga's retaliation was merciless.

Those who remained in Arioka Castle—men, women, and children alike, even the women who prepared food—were all slaughtered.

Let us return to the story.

While all eyes were fixed upon the exchange between Murashige and Kyūzaemon before Amagasaki Castle, the boat carrying Thomas had drifted down the Inagawa to near Tsukaguchi.

At that moment—

The young man at the bow raised a warning.

Startled, Tokiko and the old warrior quickly covered themselves with straw mats to hide.

From the mist ahead, another small boat approached.

The young man tensed—enemy?

But then, as if reading their fear, one of the men aboard the approaching boat suddenly raised high a banner—

A white field, marked with a black cross.

"Oh—Lord Ukon's men!"

The tension broke at once.

Soon the two boats came ashore.

Before the man bearing the cross banner had even stepped onto land, he leapt from the boat and approached them.

He handed the banner to another, and bowed deeply.

It was Takayama Ukon himself.

Without showing surprise, Tokiko bowed deeply in return.

"Through your guidance, Lord Ukon, my husband and I were granted—even if only for a short time—the grace of becoming a true husband and wife.

"My husband Tadamichi departed this morning with Lord Kyūzaemon for Amagasaki, but in his heart, he intends to return to Arioka Castle.

"Now that I have entrusted Thomas to your care, I too must return to the castle, to share my husband's fate until the end—to fulfill my love for him, and through that, my love for Deus.

"There is only one thing that weighs upon my heart.

"I beg of you—please, I entrust Thomas to you."

Taking Thomas by the hand, Tokiko placed around his neck a small lacquered pendant.

As she bent down to fasten it, she spoke softly:

"Your mother must return to your father.

"If I am granted life, I will surely come for you.

…But it may be that we shall never meet again.

You must be prepared for that.

Inside this is the image of the Virgin Mary.

When you feel lonely, think of this as your mother, and live on."

It was an oval container of black lacquer, adorned with a cross in gold maki-e.

When opened, a small sacred image lay within—

Mary, holding the infant Jesus, her face gentle and full of tenderness.

Before long, the small boat carrying Tokiko turned and made its way back toward Arioka Castle.

Thomas stood, holding Ukon's hand, watching it go.

And within his heart remained forever his mother's words:

"If I live, I will surely come for you."

## 9

Nobunaga's brutal postwar reprisals began.

Declaring that "however regrettable, it is unavoidable in order to punish Araki Settsu-no-kami and Kyūzaemon," Nobunaga ordered the execution of all who had survived.

As if to test his loyalty, he commanded Ukon to carry out the

execution—at Nanamatsu along the Inagawa River—of the wives and children of notable samurai, as well as non-combatants such as servants and retainers.

Once one yields to power, compromise breeds further compromise without end.

Ukon had chosen the path of renunciation, abandoning everything to become a man of faith.

Yet by agreeing to serve Nobunaga, he had been forced to fight against his own lord, Murashige.

And now, he was ordered to execute the very people who had survived.

Murashige, whom Ukon had betrayed, never killed Ukon's own child or younger sister, who had been given as hostages.

That fact tormented Ukon all the more.

As a follower of Christ, he believed he must remain pure.

Yet the age of warring states dragged him in directions he most abhorred.

And in the end, it placed upon him the very label he despised:

hypocrite.

Others might not say it aloud, but surely they thought it:

"Ukon speaks of noble ideals, yet when it matters most, he retreats to safety."

He knew it to be true.

On the day of the executions, Ukon withdrew into a makeshift tea room he had built at Tsukaguchi.

There he remained, as though enduring some trial, waiting only for it all to end.

Beside him sat Thomas, listening intently to the gunshots and screams carried from outside.

The execution ground at Nanamatsu was a scene of utter horror.

The prisoners were brought by boat along the Inagawa.

Mothers held their children's hands.

Infants were placed upon ox carts.

They proceeded quietly toward the place of execution.

Within the enclosure of bamboo barriers stood dozens of stakes.

Foot soldiers bound the arriving women and children to those stakes without ceremony.

The youngest children were tied together with their mothers.

Then—

"Fire!"

At the command, gunfire erupted all at once.

In an instant, the field was filled with screams, prayers, and sprays of blood.

The soldiers rushed forward through the lingering smoke.

They tore the bodies from the stakes and dragged them to carts.

Those who still lived were finished off with spear or sword.

When the bodies had been cleared away, the next group was brought forward—

bound to the same stakes, now soaked with blood.

This was repeated again and again across the execution ground.

At first, some in the crowd wept at the sight of the children.

Others watched out of morbid curiosity.

But soon, the stench of blood overwhelmed them.

People began to turn away. Some retched.

The executions, which had begun in the morning, continued until past noon.

It is said that no fewer than one hundred twenty-two women and children were put to death that day.

The Shinchō Kōki records:

"Those who witnessed this sight could not erase its image from their minds for twenty or thirty days."

And elsewhere:

"People were so overcome that they covered their eyes and could not bear to look again."

Ukon endured the gunshots and cries from within the tea room.

Then—

a small hand grasped his.

It was Thomas.

The boy was trembling, stifling his sobs, his body shaking with fear.

Ukon drew him close.

The small warmth within his arms was unbearably precious.

And as he comforted Thomas, he felt, as though in return, that he himself was being healed.

But the executions were not yet over.

That afternoon, some five hundred servants of Arioka Castle were confined within four farmhouses.

The doors were nailed shut.

They were burned alive.

Three days later, at the riverbed of Rokujō in Kyoto, the Araki clan was annihilated.

Among those executed were Murashige's wife Dashi and many members of his family.

Included among them was Kyūzaemon's young son, Jinen.

And yet—

there was no sign of Thomas's father or mother.

They had likely perished in the final battle of Arioka Castle.

# 10

After the fall of Arioka Castle, Thomas spent nearly three years under the care of Takayama Ukon in Takatsuki. When he was six, a seminary was built in Azuchi, the castle town of Nobunaga, and Thomas was entrusted to it.

The founding of the seminary was due to the efforts of Father Valignano, Visitor of the Society of Jesus. First, one was opened in Arima in Kyushu; the following year, with Nobunaga's permission, another was established in Azuchi.

Nobunaga valued Takayama Ukon's role in the campaign against Araki and extended strong protection to Christianity. For the construction of the seminary, he not only granted land at the foot of Azuchi Castle's keep, but supported the work in every way, from arranging carpenters to allowing the same tiles used for the castle keep itself.

Ukon also helped with the construction.

It was not merely a matter of convenience or financial support. He appeared almost every day among the laborers, carrying timber with them, as though performing a penitential labor of atonement.

Around this time, Ukon began to study Latin.

"To truly convey the teachings of Christ," he said, "one must know the language of Europe."

He urged young Thomas to do the same.

"I am too old to learn the language of the padres' country. Thomas, you must learn it. You must convey the teachings of Jesus in the language of this land."

And so, when the Azuchi Seminary was completed, Thomas entered as one of its first students.

Its rector was Father Organtino, the Italian missionary who had baptized Thomas.

Thomas, at six, was the youngest student. The oldest was fifteen. In all, some fifteen or sixteen boys were gathered there. Many were the children of warlords who had lost their families in battle, or sons of devout Christian believers. Some had entered by their own wish.

Later, one of them, Paulo Miki—who would die under Hideyoshi's anti-Christian policy and be numbered among the Twenty-Six Martyrs—was also a student at this Azuchi Seminary.

It was an age when Nobunaga's taste for foreign things had suddenly burst into bloom.

In the streets, Western-style clothing was adopted. Even those who were not Christians wore crosses, and rosaries were treated like ornaments.

In Kyoto, a three-story church towered over the city. On the main streets, young men in kimono wore European collars, and some wore calções in place of hakama.

At the Azuchi Seminary too, the voices of children learning

Western music and the sound of the organ were heard constantly. Nobunaga himself would visit the seminary and listen to the music.

But for Thomas, Nobunaga's visits were nothing but terror.

Nobunaga showed no emotion. He merely listened silently to the Western melodies played by the students.

Whenever Thomas stole a glance at that expression, the gunshots and death cries he had heard at Nanamatsu came back to life inside his head.

Did Lord Nobunaga wear that same expression when he heard those gunshots and screams?

The gunshots and screams revived in Thomas's mind gradually took on substance. They overflowed from his head, slowly transforming the world around him into the execution ground at Nanamatsu.

Just as a scream was about to escape his lips, his mother's voice returned:

If I live, I will surely come for you.

Thomas clung to that voice and desperately endured his fear.

Before long, Nobunaga—the very symbol of terror for Thomas—was dead.

In 1582, the year after the seminary was built, the so-called Incident at Honnōji occurred. Nobunaga was struck down in Kyoto by Akechi Mitsuhide.

It happened soon after the boys of the Tenshō Embassy had departed.

But the turmoil did not remain confined to Kyoto.

At the same time that Mitsuhide attacked Honnōji, he also had Nobunaga's base at Azuchi attacked. As a result, even the Azuchi Seminary was reduced to ashes.

Father Organtino, the Italian missionary and rector of the seminary, fled Azuchi with the students.

First, they crossed Lake Biwa by small boat to Okinoshima. From there, they fled to Sakamoto on the opposite shore.

Sakamoto, of course, was Akechi's stronghold.

There, however, Father Organtino and the others were protected by Akechi's men, who sought to win the Christians to their side. Amid the chaos, they were guided safely to the Nanban church in Kyoto.

Thomas crossed the Yamanaka Pass with the older Paulo Miki holding his hand.

Along the way, again and again, he looked back toward Azuchi.

For some reason, he could not shake the feeling that once he left the seminary, everything precious—his mother, and even the memories of his mother—would disappear.

He knew that his mother was dead.

And yet Thomas had sustained himself by waiting for her.

No—perhaps within the act of waiting, he was trying to feel her presence.

That was why moving to some unknown place filled him with unbearable anxiety.

He had carried that same anxiety when he left Takatsuki and

came to Azuchi.

Now, as he fled Azuchi, he was bewildered by the unstable feeling that a hollow space had opened inside him. He could hardly endure it.

Thomas searched his memory for his mother's voice.

If I live, I will surely come for you…

By bringing back his mother's voice and feeling from within that memory, Thomas tried to soothe his fear.

But he could not remember her voice.

He searched desperately through his heart, and at last, he reached it.

At that very moment—

"'Thomas, mou sugu desu. Mou sugu Kyoto desu. Daijōbu desu ka?"

Father Organtino's words of encouragement pulled Thomas back into the real world.

"Among the eleven there was one called Thomas, a doubter. When Jesus came, he was absent. And when the other disciples said, 'We have seen the Lord,' Thomas said: Unless I see the wounds in His hands, and place my finger in the marks of the nails, and put my hand into the wound in His side, I will not receive it in faith…"

Chiyo had turned her back to the two men, as if rejecting the Thomas before her. In a low murmur, she was pouring out the Japanese catechetical texts she had stored within herself all these

years.

Thomas, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus, was the man who refused to believe in the Lord's resurrection even after the other disciples spoke of it.

"Unless I see the marks of the nails in His hands, and put my finger into those marks, and place my hand into His side, I will never believe."

Then the risen Christ appeared before Thomas and said:

"Put your finger here, and see My hands. Reach out your hand, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

Jesus also appeared to Thomas again when Thomas was in Caesarea and commanded him to go preach in India to King Gundaphar.

One could not go to India without being prepared for martyrdom.

To the hesitant Thomas, Jesus said:

"Thomas, go. Do not be afraid. I shall watch over you. And when you have converted the people of India, you shall come to Me with the palm of martyrdom."

Thus Thomas went to India and became its first martyr.

The legend of Thomas was included in the apocryphal Acts of Thomas and in the Golden Legend, compiled in the twelfth century. It was also included in Santos no Gosagyō, printed in Japan in 1591.

The words now escaping Chiyo's lips were surely a passage from that Santos no Gosagyō.

Chiyo, who had loved Thomas like an elder brother, had first memorized this very passage.

Saint Thomas said: "Lord, wherever and to whatever place You may send me, I beg You to excuse me from going to the lands of the South." Then Jesus Christ said: "I too shall go with you and lend you strength. Therefore, do not fear. After you have made those people Christians, you shall come to Me with the rank of martyr."

Ryōhaku listened to Chiyo's voice and thought:

Did Lord Ukon know about this Saint Thomas? Did he know, and choose this baptismal name for me?

Father Organtino surely knew. But how much did he know of the Gospel of Thomas—the text the Christian Church avoided as heresy?

How much did he know of the true form of that man who was called Saint Thomas on one side, and yet avoided as heretical on another?

How much meaning was there in the baptismal name Thomas that was given to me?

Then, in Thomas's heart, the words of Giordano Bruno, heard in the prison of the Inquisition, came back to life.

"Thomas… an inscrutable name."

"Which Thomas do you intend to become?"

# 11

"He hasn't returned to the hotel."

The interpreter who had gone to make a phone call came back and reported.

It had already been three hours since Yasuo disappeared.

Fujii, the producer, and the interpreter had remained at the Vatican to search for him, but even now, after three hours, there was still no clue as to his whereabouts.

"If it were me, I'd go back to the hotel if I got separated from the group. We're staying there again tonight anyway… I'm sure Yasuo will show up there sooner or later."

That was probably true. It should be true.

And yet, for some reason, Fujii couldn't feel at ease.

Fujii had known Yasuo since he joined the production company.

It had only been about three years, but somehow it felt much longer.

Yasuo wasn't the type who excelled brilliantly at his work.

But he had a strong sense of responsibility—almost too strong.

In this line of work, that very trait sometimes worked against him.

In short, he didn't know how to cut corners.

Fujii often thought, At this rate, he'll burn himself out someday.

And yet, the staff trusted him precisely because of that.

Could a man like that—who had been leading the group—simply vanish?

…No. That wasn't the kind of man Yasuo was.

Fujii could only conclude that Yasuo had gotten caught up in some kind of trouble.

Shinji Fujii—

Once, in the early days of television, he had produced a ninety-minute anti-war drama that won a prestigious Arts Festival award.

At the time, it was groundbreaking.

Since then, he had been notoriously strict about his work, feared by young staff and performers alike as "Oni Fujii"—Fujii the Demon.

And yet, for some reason, he eventually left the television industry he had long been part of, and started anew as a producer in a commercial production company.

What's more, he chose to move away from Tokyo and requested a position at the Osaka branch.

By the time Fujii appeared in Osaka—surrounded by rumors and legends—Yasuo had just completed his year as an assistant and was about to stand on his own as a production coordinator.

His very first job was a television commercial for a regional power company.

And the producer in charge was Shinji Fujii.

The concept itself was nothing particularly new.

But there were several troublesome conditions.

The first involved aerial filming of transmission towers running through mountainous terrain.

The problem was that the area was interlaced with power lines from two different companies.

It was absolutely essential that no competitor's transmission lines appear in the footage.

The only way to distinguish them was by the shape of the towers—specifically, whether the arm at the top had two tiny horn-like protrusions.

The second challenge was filming a thermal power plant on the coast.

Operations could not be stopped.

However, due to environmental sensitivities, it was unacceptable for smoke to be seen coming from the chimneys.

They didn't want to create the impression of pollution.

At the same time, they couldn't cheat with partial shots—they needed a full view of the plant.

The first problem could be handled during film editing.

The second was far more troublesome.

In reality, the chimneys of thermal plants at that time barely emitted visible smoke.

The emissions were filtered, so nothing noticeable could be

seen with the naked eye.

…But on film, the smoke still appeared.

And stopping operations was not an option.

As a last resort, they arranged to reduce the plant's output to the absolute minimum for about an hour.

At that level, no matter how hard one tried, the smoke would be invisible to the naked eye.

The cameraman approved.

The director, looking through the viewfinder, approved.

After a month-long shoot, the entire team returned to Osaka in high spirits.

But when they reviewed the rush footage, they were stunned.

There was no smoke.

But the air above the chimney, heated by the exhaust, shimmered like a mirage.

As expected, the advertising agency rejected it.

For nearly two hours, the screening room turned into a strategy meeting.

Reshooting wouldn't improve things.

Using still images would feel unnatural.

In a one-minute commercial, visuals were everything.

After everyone—the cameraman, the director—had given

their opinions, Yasuo quietly spoke up to Producer Fujii.

"What if… we just cut off the top of the chimney?"

It was the simplest idea.

And the most effective.

Trim the frame right below the top of the chimney.

No unnaturalness.

No need for reshooting.

No special effects.

The cheapest and most effective solution.

When the finished film was screened, neither the sponsor nor the agency raised any objections.

From that point on, Yasuo was almost always assigned as production coordinator for Fujii's projects.

But as for being quick-witted—

That moment had been the first and last.

"I'll have to train him myself, or he won't survive in this industry."

That became Fujii's favorite line.

When he had no work, Yasuo often went to the studio on the eighth floor of an advertising agency building.

He liked chatting with the art crew—the set builders who used the place as their base.

Among them, he especially enjoyed talking with Imuta, the scenic artist who painted the backgrounds on the studio's cyclorama wall.

Imuta had once aspired to become a painter, and he would often speak about the works of Raphael and Botticelli.

Whenever he talked about Renaissance art, Imuta became a different person.

Facing the blank wall of the studio, he would speak at length as if The Birth of Venus or The Transfiguration were actually hanging there before him.

Yasuo didn't fully understand what he was saying.

But he liked the passion in Imuta's voice.

That day, too, he had been listening to a story about Florence.

When suddenly, Fujii appeared at the studio and said to Yasuo,

"I need to talk to you."

Sensing the mood, Imuta quietly excused himself and returned to the art room.

Once they were alone, Fujii got straight to the point.

"Do you have any savings?"

"A little…"

Yasuo wondered if Fujii was about to lecture him—as usual—about "financial planning."

But instead, Fujii said:

"Lend me about three hundred thousand yen. I'll pay you back

with interest."

"I don't have that kind of money. A hundred thousand is my limit!"

"A hundred thousand, huh? Fine. Lend me that."

It's Fujii, Yasuo thought. It'll be okay.

Fujii always looked after him. He often took him out drinking.

"Sure," Yasuo replied casually.

As soon as he said it, Fujii—perhaps out of embarrassment—put on a serious expression, took out a memo pad, scribbled something quickly, and handed it to him.

"Withdraw the money and bring it here."

"Right now?"

"Yeah. I'm in a hurry."

Not fully understanding what was going on, Yasuo went to the place written on the memo.

It was a small loan office.

The hundred thousand yen he handed over disappeared immediately—used to pay the interest on Fujii's debt.

Yasuo began to understand why Fujii had left Tokyo.

He couldn't really complain, since Fujii often treated him, but—the man spent money recklessly.

They always went to exclusive membership clubs.

There, Fujii would lecture the bunny girls:

"A proper human being works when the sun is up and rests

when it goes down. This kind of job isn't for humans."

And by the end, it always turned into boasting about the dramas he had made.

"Back at ○○ TV, everybody knew "Oni Fujii," he would say.

For Yasuo, it would have been far more helpful if Fujii had simply repaid the loan.

But more than a year had passed, and there wasn't the slightest sign of repayment.

Still, perhaps as a substitute, Fujii looked after him well at work.

And he trusted him.

(What the hell happened to him…? Where did he go?)

Yasuo had lost his way.

The underground waterway eventually narrowed until there was no footing left.

And yet, stepping into the water was something he couldn't bring himself to do.

He remembered passing two branching paths earlier.

I'll have to go back to the nearest one, he thought.

He retraced his steps along the branching passage—

but now another problem arose:

the batteries in his penlight.

He turned the light on briefly, checked his direction, then switched it off and proceeded by touch.

After a while, he turned it on again to confirm his path.

He repeated this process again and again.

But now—

he had no idea where he was.

Only darkness.

Even the sound of water had disappeared.

Then—

when he turned on the penlight once more—

the weak beam illuminated the figure of a young woman.

She turned toward him, startled by the sudden light.

Her face, slightly frowning against the brightness, was filled with a fresh, almost sacred beauty—

like the statue of Ashura at Kōfuku-ji.

She gave him a faint smile—

and then vanished from the circle of light.

Her hair was wrapped in what looked like a decorative hood.

The same cloth as her robe framed her face like a turban, accentuating her delicate, almost boyish features.

…That face.
That medieval attire.
He had seen them somewhere before.

But where?
He couldn't possibly know a woman like that.
And more than anything—
why would she be here?

Pushing aside the vague questions rising in his mind,
Yasuo began to follow her.

She might lead me back to the surface.
No—she will.

He ran after her.

## 12

After finishing a late lunch, Imuta returned to his small makeshift room—nothing more than a partitioned corner of the studio.

There, on the small sofa, sat Branch Manager Oyamada, a man who rarely showed his face.

The flimsy coffee table was piled high with art books.

Oyamada had picked one up and was flipping through its pages absentmindedly.

"Yasuo has gone missing in Rome."

Without even turning toward Imuta, Oyamada muttered this while keeping his eyes on the book.

"What? What happened in Rome?"

"I'd like to know that myself. I just got a call from Fujii a moment ago."

"In Rome, it must be around six in the morning right now…"

"He disappeared while visiting St. Peter's. They say he didn't even return to the hotel last night."

"…I see."

"The crew is leaving Rome today, but Fujii says he'll stay behind. I just hope Yasuo hasn't gotten caught up in something… By the way, you were close with him, weren't you? Have you noticed anything unusual lately?"

"Nothing in particular…"

"I see. We may have to send you to Rome. Let me know if anything comes to mind."

With that, Oyamada left the room.

Imuta's eyes fell upon the art book Oyamada had been looking at—and he froze.

On the open page was a painting believed to be Guido Reni's

portrait of Beatrice Cenci.

Her gaze seemed to question him.

Yasuo had once asked him about that painting.

That had been shortly after Yasuo's trip to Rome was decided—almost half a year ago now.

Imuta's studio was something of a refuge for Yasuo.

Whenever something weighed on him, he would come there.

That day, too, as Imuta was painting a blue sky backdrop on the studio cyclorama, Yasuo had appeared behind him—his face pale.

"You look pretty worn out. Come on, I'll make some coffee."

Imuta set down his brush and led him into his small room.

"Ever since my trip to Rome was decided… I've started seeing strange visions."

As soon as he sat down on the worn sofa, Yasuo began to speak.

That day, Yasuo had gone to the Toei processing lab in Uzumasa to pick up developed film, and then headed straight to the screening room at the advertising agency.

In truth, there was no projectionist.

The production coordinator did everything.

From calculating budgets during planning, to scouting locations, negotiating shoots, assisting direction during filming—

and after filming, even transporting the film and operating the projector.

Entering the projection booth, Yasuo opened a silver can containing a 35mm film reel.

Inside, a dense coil of black film lay tightly wound.

It was raw footage—barely transferred, not yet edited, unseen by any of the staff.

He soaked gauze with paraffin oil and gently wiped the reel, then set it into the projector.

"Ready!"

He called out through the booth window.

"Okay, roll it," came the cameraman's voice.

The lights went out.

The projector started.

The shutter opened.

The gray screen suddenly lit up—

and the silent footage began to spread across it.

"This cut works—it's got a great mood."

"We shot a backup for the next one, though…"

"Yeah… this is good. Let's use this. What do you think, Yamachan?"

The room grew lively, then quiet again, over and over.
Eventually, the first reel ended.
The screen turned completely white.

Normally, the projector would stop with a click, the light cut off, and a gentle darkness would return.
But today—
the white light continued to shine.

"Hey! Stop it! Roll the next reel!"
The cameraman called out, annoyed.
No response.
The projector kept spinning.
The screen remained white.

"Hey, Yasuo! What are you doing—sleeping in there?!"
The cameraman peeked into the booth—
and froze.

Yasuo lay collapsed on the floor, foam at his mouth.
His eyes had rolled back, showing only white.
His body convulsed as if locked in a seizure.

"Ever since then… something's been wrong."

"Do you have epilepsy?"

Even when asked, Yasuo himself didn't know how to answer.

He had never had such a seizure before.

All he knew was this—

At that moment, he had seen something else on the screen.

A pitch-dark underground world.

A stone cell like a dungeon.

Suddenly, a blinding world of daylight.

And within it—

a man, looking up in despair, engulfed in flames.

The images were blurred, like covered in mosaic—

yet overwhelmingly real.

Since then, he had been plagued by the same dreams.

In those dreams, the setting shifted—

sometimes the Middle East, sometimes Europe, sometimes a rural Japanese landscape.

He wandered, lost.

Rough buildings made of stone and plaster lined the path.

He walked, searching for something.

Eventually, he would realize:

If I go this way, I'll reach that underground world.
And yet—
no matter how much he resisted—
his feet would carry him there.

I don't want to go. I don't want to go…

That was when he met the girl.
She would lead him toward the underground prison.

And just before reaching it—
he would wake, drenched in sweat.

At first, he felt relief.
It was just a dream…
But when he fell asleep again—
the dream would continue.

"I am Thomas Araki…"
"Thomas… a strange name. Which Thomas do you intend to become?"

He never actually heard the voice.
And yet, upon waking, those words remained—
along with the blurred image of the girl.

And not just dreams—
He began to suffer from sleep paralysis.

Whenever he dozed off from exhaustion, it would happen.
His body would go numb.
He couldn't move.
And rough, fragmented images would unfold in his mind.

A long staircase descending underground.
At the bottom—
a vast chamber filled with people.
The girl was there.
So were a Japanese man named Thomas.
And a philosopher named Bruno.

Then, a young Italian man spoke:
"I was tortured… and then killed by having my skull crushed with a hammer."

At that moment, the scene appeared before him like a screen.

The man, covered in blood, was forced down onto an execution block.
In front of him stood his younger brother, trembling in fear.
He begged the priest beside him to take the boy away.
But the priest only shook his head.

Despair overtook the man's face.

Then—
the hammer came down.

Blood splattered—
bursting out of the screen—
onto Yasuo's face.

"AAAAAH!"

His scream shattered the paralysis.

It happened in the editing room.
Fortunately, both the editor and the director were out for lunch.
No one witnessed his condition.

"Am I… going insane?"

Yasuo had fled the editing room and gone straight to Imuta's studio.
After talking for a while, color gradually returned to his face.
To Yasuo, Imuta was a strange kind of presence.
For some reason, talking with him calmed him down.
Perhaps much of that had to do with Imuta's wife, Kiyoka.
She had once been a strip dancer, and Imuta had gone to see

her again and again until he finally married her.

Kiyoka was even more mysterious than Imuta.

When one spoke to her about one's troubles, somehow those troubles began to seem insignificant.

It was not that she said anything in particular, nor that she did anything.

And yet…

Perhaps the reason Yasuo felt calm when talking with Imuta was that Kiyoka stood behind him.

Through Imuta, Yasuo felt as though he were speaking with her.

"This coffee is good."

"Of course it is. I made it with an espresso machine I bought with my secret savings."

"Wasn't that at your house?"

"Kiyoka said it was in the way and nearly threw it out. So I brought it here."

"If it's Kiyoka, she really might have thrown it away."

His recovery was so complete that it was hard to believe he had been so shaken only moments before.

Once Yasuo had calmed down, his eyes fell upon an art collection lying open on the cluttered table.

There—

he saw the face of the girl.

A sharp, almost boyish face.

A white hood covered her head, making her features stand out all the more.

And now, from the open book on the table, the girl seemed to be smiling at him.

"Beatrice Cenci."

Imuta, carrying a second cup of coffee, noticed Yasuo staring at the art book and answered.

"If you go to Rome, you might be able to see the real thing. A little way from the Spanish Steps, there's a palace called the Palazzo Barberini. It's famous for the illusionistic ceiling fresco by Cortona. On the second floor is the National Gallery of Ancient Art. I've never been there myself, though…

"But imagine it. Along those corridors, paintings from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century—Filippo Lippi, El Greco, Raphael, Caravaggio—all lined up one after another. And at the very end of that corridor, in a place like a pocket where darkness gathers, hangs this portrait of Beatrice Cenci by Guido Reni."

Yasuo stared hard at the portrait, as if it might begin speaking to him at any moment.

"She's known as a tragic beauty who killed her own father."

"She killed her father?"

"Apparently, he was a terrible man. Violent, a womanizer. He laid hands on the maids as a matter of course, and in the end, even on his own daughter Beatrice. Driven to desperation, she

conspired with her brother and stepmother and had a man named Olimpio—who was in love with her—kill her father.

"When the plot was discovered, Beatrice and the main members of the Cenci family were put on trial. She insisted on her innocence to the end, but in the end, most of the family was executed in the square at Ponte Sant'Angelo.

"Her beauty and dignity moved all of Rome to support her. Even foreign diplomatic envoys supposedly petitioned the Pope for clemency. But all of it was ignored.

"Nobles were not supposed to be tortured, but even that privilege was stripped away by the Pope.

"It's a terrible story. Today, someone might argue it was self-defense against her father's violence…"

"You know a lot about this, Imuta."

"It's secondhand from Stendhal. The sensational nature of the case seems to have deeply stirred artists and writers. Stendhal wrote a novella called The Cenci based on it. The English poet Shelley wrote a four-act tragedy, also called The Cenci. And in painting, besides Reni, Paul Delaroche and Antoine de Guny also painted this unfortunate young beauty."

"When did it happen?"

"She was executed in September 1599. Four months later, the philosopher Giordano Bruno, who had also been imprisoned in Castel Sant'Angelo, was burned at the stake."

The instant Yasuo heard the name Bruno, gooseflesh rose across his body.

A fear spread through him—

as if the paralysis might seize him again.

He summoned the vague outline of the girl who appeared in his dreams and visions, then placed that image over the girl in the painting.

(It's her. No doubt about it.)

"What's wrong? You're pale again."

"I'm all right. It doesn't seem like it's going to happen."

"What do you mean, it?"

"No, nothing… More importantly, Imuta—if you have Stendhal's The Cenci, could you lend it to me?"

"Sorry, I don't. But it should be in the company reference room."

With those words behind him, Yasuo left Imuta's studio.

Imuta thought:

Should I tell the branch manager about this?

It had happened half a year ago.

And since then, Yasuo seemed to have calmed down.

He had apparently spoken with Kiyoka too, and she had said,

"Yasuo will be all right now."

And yet…

# 13

## Castel Sant'Angelo, Rome, February 1599

East of St. Peter's Basilica stands the massive fortress known as Castel Sant'Angelo.

It was originally built as the mausoleum of the Roman emperor Hadrian, but from the Middle Ages into the early modern period, it served as a refuge for the Pope in times of danger. In 1527, Pope Clement VII endured the six-month Sack of Rome by Emperor Charles V's forces within this very fortress.

From the left wing of St. Peter's, a single corridor extends from the papal palace to Castel Sant'Angelo. It is called the Passetto di Borgo, the Vatican passageway. When danger threatened, the Pope crossed this passage and fled to the fortress.

But Castel Sant'Angelo had another face.

It was also a prison of the Inquisition.

Broadly speaking, the fortress consists of two parts. One is the enormous circular base, once used as the mausoleum. Upon that base stand later structures built in subsequent ages.

Inside the base, everything is enclosed by earth and thick stone walls—dark, damp, and oppressive. Above it, the added structures shine, at least, in the bright light of day.

It is almost like a "subterranean labyrinth" beneath and an "earthly paradise" above.

And within the womb of that base—within what could only be called an underground maze—the prison of the Inquisition crouched in darkness.

Giordano Bruno was confined in one of its cells.

Arrested for heresy against the Roman Catholic Church, he had already endured nearly eight years of harsh interrogation.

Even now, freed from the dreadful torture known as the "vigil," Bruno lay in the corner of his cell like a dead man.

The torture consisted of being suspended by the arms, bound behind the back, for an entire day and night. During that time, sleep was not permitted. Even during brief interruptions, he was lowered onto a chair fitted with blades, so that he could not relax even for a moment.

When the torture ended, Bruno had been dragged back to his cell unconscious.

How long had he remained senseless?

He awoke from cold and from the intense pain in his shoulder. His left shoulder seemed to be dislocated.

Beside him lay a miserable meal of bread and water.

Enduring the pain, Bruno dragged himself toward the water, drank greedily, and bit into the bread.

The ice-cold water only made his body tremble more violently.

…Footsteps.

Bruno listened carefully.

In the pitch darkness, all the senses in his body sharpened strangely,

and he could tell the men's movements as if he could see them.

Two people.

Not the footsteps of jailers.

They were climbing the broad stone steps quietly, cautiously, taking care not to be noticed.

Most likely they had come through the secret underground passage from the crypt of St. Peter's to this fortress.

If so, one of them must be Bartolomeo.

He was said to be illegitimate, yet apparently connected to the Medici family of Florence. It seemed he had the backing of Cardinal Alessandro, also of the Medici line.

Whether he had bribed the guards, or whether Cardinal Alessandro's hand had reached this far, Bartolomeo had slipped into the fortress with ease and sought instruction from Bruno.

In the depths of night at Castel Sant'Angelo, through the thick door of this prison, Bruno taught a young man whose face he had never seen about the Absolute One and the infinity of the universe.

For Bruno, this would probably be his final lesson.

And yet, for a man who hoped to become a cardinal in the future to listen so eagerly to "natural magic" and "the infinity of the universe"…

If discovered, he could be arrested as a heretic.

At worst, burned at the stake.

In that sense, he truly must have carried Medici blood.

Once, Lorenzo de' Medici had made Florence a center of humanist learning, almost as if in opposition to the authority

of Christianity—though he had worn the splendid disguise of patronage over church architecture and art.

That Bartolomeo had told him:

"There is someone I would like you to meet."

The man, he said, had come from faraway Japan.

His name, if Bruno remembered correctly, was Thomas Araki.

Just as he turned the corner, the sensation beneath Yasuo's feet changed—

from earth to hard stone.

At that instant, he felt the knot that had been troubling him dissolve.

There was no mistake.

That girl was Beatrice.

Beatrice Cenci.

Somewhere in his heart, he had faintly known it all along, but he had kept denying it with the thought, Impossible.

Now, in a sudden flash, it fell into place.

At the same time, Yasuo was no longer Yasuo.

Naturally—so naturally that even the transition itself never rose into awareness—he shifted into the person of Thomas Araki.

Yasuo—

no, Thomas—

was following a man walking ahead of him.

Bartolomeo.

In Bartolomeo's hand, a candle lit the gently rising stone stairs.

After climbing several steps, Bartolomeo stopped.

He turned toward Thomas behind him and looked upward along the wall to the left.

As the candle was raised to follow his gaze, a small window fitted with iron bars appeared in the light.

The window was too high to reach, and there was no way to peer inside.

Nor could it possibly serve to admit light in such depths below the earth.

Perhaps this little window was the only vent through which the stale air of the prison could be exchanged.

Bartolomeo's gaze caught Thomas again, then guided his attention forward.

The candlelight crawled along the wall.

At the place where it stopped, a black wooden door reinforced with iron fittings emerged from the darkness.

This was the entrance to the cell where Bruno was imprisoned.

Prompted by Bartolomeo, Thomas stepped forward.

The door was barred with black iron and secured with a heavy lock.

Bartolomeo set the candle at his feet and knocked softly.

"It is Bartolomeo."

"……"

A heavy silence followed.

After a while—

"I have been waiting… Is the visitor from Japan with you?"

The voice came painfully from near the bottom of the door.

He was probably crouched there, leaning against it.

Through the door, they could sense him trying to adjust his position.

At that moment—

"Ugh!"

A suppressed cry of pain escaped him.

"Forgive me. I was suspended all day. It seems my left shoulder is dislocated."

"Master, are you all right?"

"I am. Speaking distracts me. First, let me hear the voice of our guest from Japan."

"…I am Thomas. Thomas Araki."

"Thomas… an inscrutable name.

"Among the disciples of Jesus, there was Thomas, said to have been martyred in India and preserved in the Golden Legend. Yet in truth, he was the first man the Vatican rejected as a heretic.

"Of course, as long as the Vatican continues to conceal the existence of the Gospel of Thomas, Thomas remains a saint in its eyes.

"On the other hand, the man who helped establish the central Catholic doctrine of the Trinity—he too was Thomas. Thomas Aquinas, whom I admired in my youth.

"And then there are humanists like Thomas More, who turned his back on Catholicism.

"So tell me—

Which Thomas do you intend to become?"

From within the door, along with that restrained voice, came occasional groans of pain.

"……"

"Well, no matter. First, tell me why you have come from Japan.

"For curiosity, to me now, is the finest stimulant."

## 14

Thomas and Miguel had crossed all the way to Rome partly, of course, to study at the Collegio Romano and be ordained as missionaries. But above all, they had come in order to bring back the Bible that would serve as the source text for translating the life and teachings of Jesus into Japanese.

The ones who supported this plan were Suetsugu Kōzen, one of the elders of Nagasaki's inner town and a famed red-seal ship merchant, and his son Heizō.

Suetsugu Kōzen was said to have originally come from the Kimura family of the Matsuura domain in Hirado. The Kimura family of Hirado had been Christian since the time of Xavier, and from that lineage came many figures who left their names in Japan's history of martyrdom: Sebastian Kimura, the first Japanese to be ordained a priest, Antonio Kimura, Maria Kimura de Murayama, and others.

Kōzen himself inherited the wealthy Suetsugu merchant house

of Hakata through family ties. In Hakata and Akizuki, he too had been such a devout Christian that he served as host to Father Valignano, Father Frois, and others.

In his generation, declaring, "From now on, trade will be Nanban trade," he moved into Nagasaki, the headland that had only recently been donated to the Jesuits by Nagasaki Jinzaemon.

Once Nagasaki was donated to the Jesuits, Portuguese ships, under Jesuit guidance, abandoned Hirado and began entering Nagasaki instead. The Jesuits held great influence over Portuguese merchants, and without the mediation of a Jesuit padre, Japanese merchants could not obtain so much as a single strand of raw silk from the Portuguese ships.

For that reason, many merchants gathered in Nagasaki, many churches were built there, and many merchants became Christians.

And through the hands of those merchants, the town of Nagasaki took shape.

Needless to say, Suetsugu Kōzen, a Christian since the time of Xavier and an influential trader from Hakata, stood at the center of that town-building.

Thus Nagasaki had begun as church territory and had grown greatly through merchants seeking Nanban trade.

But Toyotomi Hideyoshi, then stationed at Hizen Nagoya for the invasion of Korea, learned of this situation.

For a ruler seeking to unify Japan, the mere existence within Japan of church territory belonging to the Pope of Rome was a grave problem.

Still clinging like a nightmare in Hideyoshi's mind was the fierce struggle between his former lord, Oda Nobunaga, and the Ishiyama Hongan-ji, which had sought to build an independent religious state based in Kaga.

"This cannot be allowed. Absolutely not. Make Nagasaki a direct territory!"

And so Nagasaki was confiscated as a territory under direct rule.

Of course, its use as a port for Portuguese ships was most welcome. Accordingly, Christianity was tacitly tolerated. If Christianity were rashly prohibited and trade came to a halt, that would be a problem.

In Nagasaki, where such interests were intricately entangled, Suetsugu Kōzen occupied a pivotal position.

As a devout Christian since the time of Xavier, he was connected to the Jesuits and, through them, to the Portuguese merchants.

As a red-seal ship trader, he handled investments from the Nagasaki magistrate and the daimyō of western Japan.

As an elder of Nagasaki's inner town, he represented the interests of Nagasaki's merchants.

In the generation of his son Heizō, another role would be added: as Nagasaki magistrate, he would become a transmitter of orders from the Edo shogunate.

One day, an elderly Portuguese missionary visited Kōzen.

His name was Guilherme Pereira.

He was said to speak Japanese better than most Japanese, and

he got along well with Kōzen.

Long ago, many boys had been sent from the orphanage in Lisbon to India to serve as assistants to the priests working in the missions of the East.

Pereira had been one of those orphans.

Even now, he often dreamed of the day he had departed from the port of Lisbon for India.

Those who were seeing the boys off and those who were leaving stood together on the Lisbon pier, knowing they would never meet again, yet encouraging one another with the words, "Surely we will meet again."

Even after the boys had boarded, the sound of the instruments they played continued to carry on the wind.

Even now, that sorrowful melody was burned into Pereira's ears.

The reason Pereira had come to Kōzen concerned the publishing work at the Kazusa Seminary, which Kōzen also supported.

At its center were Nakaura Julião and Dorado, who had once gone to Rome as boy envoys; teachers of the seminary and college such as Fabian Fucan and Pereira himself; and students such as Thomas and Miguel.

Together, they were carrying out publishing work in Japanese movable type.

Their ultimate aim was a Japanese edition of the New Testament, which told the life of Jesus.

In Rome, Julião and the others had heard Pope Sixtus V speak of his dream: to send forth a complete Latin Bible into

the Christian world.

As the source text for translation into Japanese, they desperately wanted to obtain the Sixtus Bible.

But the Jesuits of the present day looked upon the Japanese with suspicion and contempt:

"Japanese men are better suited to serve the Church as helpers than as missionaries. They are ambitious and use the teachings of Christ for their own advancement. That is why they want to become missionaries. They cannot understand the noble teachings of Christ. If the deeper mysteries are taught to them, their ambition will lead them to distort Christianity and create another sect."

Far from cooperating with this plan, the Jesuits might even obstruct it.

"What if we sent several young Japanese men studying at the seminary to Rome?" Kōzen replied suddenly.

"Boys would not be useful for a task that requires judgment at every moment. On the other hand, men too advanced in age would not do either. What is needed is a young man with sensitivity—and a strong command of Latin."

Pereira responded as if Kōzen had said exactly what he had hoped to hear.

"There is such a man. A young man named Thomas Araki. He speaks Latin as beautifully as any missionary in Japan. And Miguel Gotō—his Latin does not equal Thomas's, but he has received

instruction in printing from his father Sōin. When it comes to printing, no one among the younger men surpasses him."

"Miguel… You mean the son of Gotō Sōin, the man who made Japanese movable type?"

"Yes. That very Gotō Sōin."

"…That is convenient. A man like him also has ties to Gotō Shōzaburō."

Gotō Shōzaburō would later be entrusted with the gold and silver mints and become one of Ieyasu's advisers—in other words, one of Ieyasu's economic counselors.

"We will provide the funds for the journey to Rome."

"But on one condition."

It was Suetsugu Heizō, Kōzen's son, who had joined the meeting midway and now spoke for the first time.

He was the man who would later bring down Nagasaki magistrate Murayama Tōan and seize for himself the post of magistrate over Nagasaki's outer town.

"When they return safely to Japan, I want them to tell me first everything they saw and heard in Rome, and along the way. Not only about Rome, but also about Portugal and other countries—for example, España, Spain—as much as possible. That is my condition."

"As much as possible will be enough," Kōzen added. "I am not asking them to investigate specific matters in detail. I only want them to tell my son Heizō, as a kind of travel tale, what they saw

and heard in Rome.

"As for me, by then I doubt I shall still be alive. It may be quicker to ask Jesus Himself.

"Well—assuming I make it to Paraíso."

## 15

Thus Thomas and Miguel came to Rome.

The Jesuits in Japan had informed the Jesuit headquarters in Rome of this movement.

"Do not trust the Japanese," they warned.

But Acquaviva, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, ignored the report.

"I cannot cast aside the desire of the people of Japan to convey the life of Jesus, and to pass on His teachings, in their own land."

When the two arrived in Rome, Acquaviva summoned Thomas and Miguel and promised full cooperation in selecting and collecting Christian texts to be translated into Japanese.

He even arranged extraordinary support for them: Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino, Doctor of the Church, would guide them in preparing the catalogue.

This stood in sharp contrast to the attitude of the Jesuits in Japan, who looked down on the Japanese.

"Translating the Bible is out of the question."

"If the Japanese are given a Bible written in their own language, who knows what they will do with it? They may interpret it to suit themselves, and even create a new sect."

"The Japanese should simply be used as servants of the Church."

Rome was different.

Alongside their studies at the Collegio Romano, Thomas and Miguel began preparing a catalogue of Christian writings to be brought back to Japan.

Cardinal Bellarmino's assistance was thorough.

He not only arranged use of the Vatican Library; if there were any other libraries they wished to use, he would make the necessary arrangements. If there were private collections they wished to examine, they were to tell him without hesitation.

"First, you must study," Bellarmino told them. "The more you learn, the more clearly you will see what books you truly need. At present, you cannot yet know what is necessary, or what should be translated. First, study. First, cultivate a faith that will not be shaken by anything."

His guidance extended even to their daily lives.

Normally, a cardinal—especially one known as a Doctor of the Church—would never involve himself in the lives of mere students. Perhaps his own feeling for the idea of a "Japanese Bible" was that strong. Even so, the delicacy of his consideration was remarkable.

At first, he said, "They will no doubt be tired in many ways. For a while, let the two Japanese share a room by themselves."

Later, however, he instructed, "Now let them room with an older student who knows the rules and daily life of the college well, and who is proficient in Latin."

When Bellarmino judged that Thomas and Miguel had grown accustomed to life at the Collegio Romano, he took them to the college library.

He must have arranged it in advance.

On the desk at the far end of the library, a single Bible had already been prepared.

As he led them to the table, Bellarmino thought:

In truth, Pope Sixtus accomplished much. Is there anywhere in Rome today untouched by his hand? Not only the dome of St. Peter's, but the obelisks set in Rome's principal places, the aqueducts, even the sewers—everything in the Rome we see today bears the breath of Sixtus.

But this Bible was different.

What Sixtus had poured the greatest labor of his life into was the revision of the Vulgate, the Latin Bible.

By rights, the Bible placed here should have been the one revised by Pope Sixtus.

That Bible—the one Sixtus had once ordered the Catholic world to use through a great papal bull declaring,

"By the fullness of apostolic authority, we decree and proclaim:

this edition… approved by the authority granted to us by the Lord, must be accepted as true and legitimate, and must serve without doubt as the foundation in all public and private disputation, preaching, and interpretation"—

not a single copy of it now remained.

What lay before the two Japanese students was the Sixto-Clementine Bible, extensively remade under Pope Clement.

Thomas found this impossible to understand.

Why did not even one copy remain?

Cardinal Bellarmino, usually so gentle in his instruction, changed suddenly whenever Thomas asked about the Sixtus Bible.

After seating the two boys, Bellarmino said:

"That Bible was abolished because it contained too many printing errors. Under the next Pope, Clement, a revised edition was issued as the Sixto-Clementine Bible. This is the one I have prepared for you. If you wish to translate the life of Jesus into Japanese, you should use this edition as your source."

His words were calm.

But beneath them was a cold pressure that made the listener shrink back.

Thomas, however, did not shrink.

"Does not even one copy of the version made by Pope Sixtus remain?"

"It remains here, as the Sixto-Clementine Bible."

"No, that is not what I mean. I am asking whether not a single

copy of the Sixtus Bible itself remains."

"There is none."

"Why does not even one copy remain?"

"…There is nothing more to say on this matter. You must learn more about obedience.

"What stands before you now is not a dead Bible, but the living Bible that moves the Catholic world today.

"Did you not come all the way to Rome in order to bring this living Bible to the believers of Japan?

"Thomas, you said it yourself. Even if translating the entire Bible proved impossible, you wanted at least to convey the life of Jesus to the Japanese believers in their own language.

"It was the desire of you two—no, of the believers of Japan—that moved me to take on this work.

"Now, Thomas, Miguel, begin your task.

"Let us see how far the two of you can go. Render the life of Jesus into Japanese."

And so their work began.

Between their studies at the college, they prepared a catalogue of Christian texts to be brought back to Japan.

And they began the Japanese translation of the New Testament.

From that time on, Thomas tried to forget the matter of the Sixtus Bible.

But something remained caught within him.

He could not forget.

Before he knew it, the question had settled deep in his heart, like a spiderweb stretched across the darkness.

What happened to the Sixtus Bible?

Even if there were many printing errors, what does it mean that not even the Vatican Library has a single copy?

Gotō Miguel was thinking the same thing.

"I want to see it too. If it had many printing errors, then all the more reason. As someone involved in printing, I would like to study it. I want to place the Sixtus Bible and the Sixto-Clementine Bible side by side and compare what changed and how.

"Though I suppose I don't know Latin nearly as well as you do."

## 16

A day at the Collegio Romano, where Thomas studied, began in winter at half past five in the morning with prayers and Mass, and ended at night with an hour of Latin review from seven to eight after supper. After that, each student examined his conscience, recited the Litany of the Blessed Virgin of Loreto, and immediately retired to bed.

At first, Thomas was assigned a room with Gotō Miguel, just the two of them. This arrangement had been made out of

consideration by Cardinal Bellarmino.

Yet there was a man who came secretly to visit their room after they had gone to bed.

His name was Bartolomeo.

He was also a student at the Collegio, and said that he had come bearing a letter from Cardinal Alessandro. The name was familiar—Thomas had heard it again and again from Nakaura Julian.

"A man you can turn to if you are ever in trouble," Julian had said.

Startled, the two quickly ushered Bartolomeo into their room and lit a candle.

"I have had no chance to deliver this," Bartolomeo said. "So I came at this late hour. Forgive my rudeness."

Thomas scarcely returned the greeting. He broke the seal of the letter at once and held it up to the candlelight.

Inside were words of fond remembrance for Julian and the other boys of the Tenshō embassy, along with a simple invitation: that they should visit when the Collegio had a holiday.

Bartolomeo, with a knowing look, said only this:

"You wish to know about the Sixtus Bible, do you not?"

Then he left.

Later, Thomas learned that Bartolomeo, like Cardinal Alessandro, belonged to the Medici family of Florence—and that both were illegitimate sons.

In any case, Bartolomeo became the first true friend Thomas and Miguel made after arriving at the Collegio Romano.

At that time, following the reforms of Pope Sixtus V, the Roman Curia had been reorganized into a number of central administrative bodies known as congregations. Among them were the Congregation of the Holy Office (the Inquisition) and the Congregation of the Council, both headed by the Pope himself, while the others were entrusted to cardinals.

Among these was the Congregation of Rites.

Until the sixteenth century, the Papacy had not exercised exclusive authority over the uniformity of liturgical practice. The essence of the liturgy had remained constant everywhere, but its expressions varied from diocese to diocese and from order to order, gradually producing small differences.

When these differences became too pronounced, problems arose.

The Council of Trent therefore sought to revise and unify the Breviary and the Missal. To ensure the enforcement of this unity, Pope Sixtus V established the Congregation of Rites.

And it was this very Congregation that was headed by Cardinal Alessandro.

It was sudden.

"Are Julian and the others well? Martino? Mancio? Are all the boys of the embassy well?"

Cardinal Alessandro embraced Thomas and Miguel as he greeted them, as though gathering them into his arms.

"Yes… they are no longer boys now," he continued. "But it is astonishing. It has been scarcely ten years since printing presses

were introduced into Japan, and already printing in Japanese has begun. I know little of your language, but I am told it is exceedingly complex. And yet you have created movable type for it. It is truly remarkable."

The conversation naturally turned to the dream of producing a Japanese Bible.

As Alessandro spoke, faces from Japan rose one after another in Thomas's mind:

Brother Pereira, the Portuguese missionary who had taught him Latin…

Gotō Sōin and Dorado, who had devoted themselves to creating Japanese type…

Nakaura Julian, who had spoken so passionately about the Sixtus Bible…

Moved by all those voices, Thomas cautiously brought up the subject.

The Sixtus Bible.

For a moment, Alessandro's expression darkened.

"This Congregation of Rites was established by Pope Sixtus," he said slowly. "It oversees the celebration of the Mass, the administration of the sacraments, and the processes of beatification and canonization. Since Pope Sixtus ascended to the papacy, I have served in this office. But as for the revision of the Bible—the one who assisted the Pope was only his private secretary. That secretary, like the Sixtus Bible itself, is no longer in this world."

"……"

"Now, in all of Rome, the one who knows the most about the Sixtus Bible… would be none other than Cardinal Bellarmino, the Doctor of the Church. The very man assisting you with your catalogue."

Miguel spoke.

"Cardinal Bellarmino does not like being asked about it. That kind man… when it comes to that subject, even anger shows on his face."

"……"

"What happened to that Bible?" Thomas asked. "Whenever it is mentioned, everyone falls silent—as though it were a forbidden secret. Is there truly no one who knows?"

"If you wish to know…" Alessandro murmured, almost to himself, "there is only one man you can ask."

"Is there someone besides Cardinal Bellarmino?" Thomas pressed.

"…There is. But it is dangerous. It will require courage. It is dangerous not only to your bodies, but also to your souls. You may come to know things you would rather not know. If you do not have the resolve, then forget the Sixtus Bible."

At that moment, Thomas realized he had already stepped into something he could not withdraw from.

There was no turning back now.

If anyone could hear such things and still retreat, that would be true courage.

Thomas thought:

(Cardinal Alessandro—despite his words, he wants us to know the truth. That is why he speaks this way. How much does he know…?)

Alessandro gave them no time to hesitate.

Without pause, a name left his lips.

"Bruno… an Italian named Giordano Bruno. He is now imprisoned in the Castel Sant'Angelo as a heretic, under interrogation."

Alessandro watched them closely, as if gauging their reaction.

Then suddenly, he said:

"Thomas, Miguel—one of you will, once a week, assist Bartolomeo in organizing the sacristy of St. Peter's Basilica. I will make the arrangements with the Collegio."

In the end, Thomas was chosen.

It was better that only one should face the danger, while the other remained at the Collegio—so that, should anything happen, there would still be someone to act.

That was Alessandro's judgment.

Still, Thomas could not help but wonder.

What connection did Alessandro—and Bellarmino—have to the Sixtus Bible?

And why, though both were cardinals, did there seem to be an invisible tension between them?

Before long, a message arrived at the Collegio from Cardinal

Alessandro:

"After assisting in the sacristy, I have a task I would like Thomas to help with. I would also like him to stay the night at my residence. I wish to hear more about Japan."

That very night, Thomas, guided by Bartolomeo, descended into a small sacristy within the cardinal's residence.

It was said that from this chamber there was an entrance to an underground passage leading from the basilica's crypts to Castel Sant'Angelo.

Upon entering, Bartolomeo handed Thomas the candle.

Then he lifted a tapestry hanging on the wall—and slipped behind it.

The fabric bulged outward in the shape of a human body. It moved faintly… and then, as though swallowed by the wall itself, vanished.

"Thomas… come," came a suppressed voice from within.

And Thomas followed.

## 17

"Since this January, Cardinal Bellarmino has become chairman of the Inquisition commission in order to denounce my heresy."

Bruno suddenly began to speak.

"Was he not the one guiding you in preparing the catalogue of books you are to take back to Japan?"

"He is brilliant, in many ways.

"Among the more than two hundred and sixty charges of heresy brought against me, he ignored the foolish and meaningless accusations. Instead, he focused only on my writings and my thought, and pressed me there.

"If the charges were absurd, I could have evaded them, dodged them, and bowed my head as many times as they wished, saying, 'I was mistaken.'

"But now, it is my thought—my philosophy—that is being judged.

"To deny that would be to deny myself.

"And yet…

"I denied it."

"In the torture of the vigil, with both arms bound behind my back and suspended through the night, all I could think of was escaping that situation.

"I said:

'If the Holy See and Your Eminences insist that this view is heretical, and if the Pope so judges, and if such is the will of God, then I am prepared to recant.'"

"By that view," Bartolomeo asked, "do you mean the infinity

of the universe?"

"Exactly.

"And also the transmigration of the soul.

"And the fact that Jesus, too, was human.

"These were the things I believed I could never yield, no matter what.

"And yet I…"

"Master," Bartolomeo said, though he knew it was useless, as if trying to comfort Bruno, "you yourself have said that words can be made to serve many purposes. Even if one defeats another with words and logic, one cannot change that person's inner thought. One cannot rule the heart."

"The body is weak," Bruno said. "By its nature, the body seeks to preserve itself. That is why pain exists.

"Even so, I believed that the spirit could transcend the body.

"Thomas from Japan—this may not be entirely unrelated to the Sixtus Bible you are searching for.

"Tell me: how do you understand the birth of Christ?

"How do you understand the virgin conception?"

"In the Dochirina Kirishitan I studied, it says: 'Not by the work of man, but solely by the wondrous design of Spiritus Santo, the Holy Spirit, was He conceived.'"

"Nonsense.

"The body cannot escape the laws of the body.

"You must not confuse the divinity of Christ with the fact that he was born as a man.

"They seek to exalt Christ as God. And upon that foundation, they establish a hierarchy of the Church with Christ at its summit, in order to rule the human world.

"That is why Christ must not be allowed to be human.

"From there they created the absurd legend of the virgin conception.

"They devised the fraud of the Trinity—God, His Son Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, three and yet of one substance.

"The man who brought forth this doctrine of the Trinity was also named Thomas.

"There is nothing there but a system designed to protect the authority of the Church.

"That doctrine was nothing more than a tool for the Church—and the Pope of Rome—to rule the world of men.

"But what is the truth?

"Jesus was born as the child of Joseph and Mary.

"He was born as a human child.

"And precisely because of that, he understood human suffering.

"He knew human weakness.

"It was because the teachings of Jesus were teachings he reached after suffering fully as a human being that they sank so deeply into people's hearts.

"Was that not the truth?

"I believe the greatness of Jesus lies in this:

"From within the strict, unforgiving teachings of Judaism, he brought forth the teaching of love—the teaching of forgiveness.

"He could do that because he was born as the son of man, because he knew human weakness and sorrow through and through.

"The birth of Jesus was not the incarnation of God, nor some illusion or expedient device.

"It was a historical fact.

"Jesus was born, unmistakably, as a single human being.

"And that very self came to the realization that he was none other than a child of God—and by extension, that all people are children of God.

"That, I believe, lies at the center of what Jesus taught.

"There were those who rewrote that teaching.

"The writings called the four great Gospels—attributed to Paul and Peter, and to Matthew and Luke—have been used by the Church as tools to control people.

"And in order to make them tools, the Scriptures themselves have been rewritten.

"It would be no mistake to begin from that assumption.

"Now, it seems the time has come to speak of another Thomas.

"You must know that, besides what are called the four Gospels, there once existed writings known as the Gospel of Thomas and

the Gospel of Mary."

For Thomas, everything Bruno said was new.

No—

it was not merely new.

It was utterly different from the image of Jesus he had heard until now.

Different from what his mother had told him.

Different from what Lord Ukon had told him.

Different from what Father Organtino had taught him at the seminary.

And yet, strangely, instead of feeling resistance, Thomas felt the words sink into his heart.

As if transferring water from one vessel into another, Bruno continued pouring his words into Thomas.

After the execution of Jesus, his teachings continued as a sect within Judaism.

His disciples, even after his death, offered prayers at the Temple in Jerusalem—the very symbol of the religious authority that Jesus had confronted.

They did so because many of them believed that this was the only way for the new faith to survive.

"It cannot be helped…" they told themselves.

But there was one man who opposed this.

A man who turned against the Jewish establishment itself.

Stephen—a Hellenistic Jew who became a disciple after the death of Jesus.

He rebuked the others:

"Jesus did not teach this!"

He denounced both his fellow believers and the Jewish priesthood.

"'The teachings of Jesus are not for a chosen few among the Jews alone.

"'They must not be bound by the Law of Judaism.

"'They must be made known to all—both to those who are circumcised and to those who are not.

"'That is what Jesus desired."

Judaism held the belief that the Jews alone were the chosen people of God.

As a sign of this covenant, every Jewish male was required to undergo circumcision.

To spread the faith to uncircumcised Gentiles was strictly forbidden by the Law.

As long as Christianity remained a part of Judaism, it could never convey God's love to all people.

Stephen declared:

"'There is no God in the Temple!"

For this boldness, he was denounced by the Jews.

He was dragged before the Temple and executed by stoning.

With his death, the fragile peace ended.

Persecution of Christians by the Jews resumed with renewed fury.

The mob that killed Stephen, still burning with the frenzy of violence, turned on the followers of Jesus, raiding their hiding places.

Among those persecutors was Paul.

He arrested believers indiscriminately and threw them into prison.

Still unsatisfied, he pursued those fleeing toward Rome, following them as far as Damascus.

And there—

he was struck by a sudden light and lost his sight.

It was at that moment, they say, that Paul heard the voice of God.

Realizing his error, he abandoned Judaism and converted to Christianity.

This event became known as the Conversion of Paul.

Afterward, Paul, as if inheriting the will of Stephen, traveled widely to spread the teachings of Christ among the Gentiles.

His journeys were filled with hardship.

He faced persecution not only from the Jews, but also from local religions wherever he went.

Paul himself said:

"I have been imprisoned, flogged, and brought near to death. We were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Within ourselves we felt the sentence of death—so that

we might not rely on ourselves, but on God who raises the dead."

In time, Paul came to Rome.

There, under Emperor Nero's persecution of Christians, he was martyred.

Nero, driven by madness, set fire to the old city of Rome in order to create a new world to his liking.

Then he blamed the Christians, turning the anger of the Roman people into a spectacle of bloody executions.

The arenas of Rome became execution grounds.

Christians were torn apart by lions.

They were burned alive as living torches.

Even Peter, who had come to Rome to preach, was crucified upside down.

Thus, the newly born Christianity lost both of its pillars:

Paul, the revolutionary,

and Peter, the moderate.

Yet persecution did not cease after Nero.

The Christians of Rome endured countless trials.

And at last, under Emperor Constantine, they gained protection.

When Constantine prepared to battle his rival Maxentius, he sought to unite the people of Rome—and saw in Christianity a means to do so.

One day in the year 312, as he marched toward battle, he is said to have seen a cross appear in the sky.

Taking it as a sign of Christ's protection, he advanced under the banner of the Cross.

The hidden faith of the Roman people was stirred to life.

With that momentum, Constantine defeated Maxentius at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge.

The following year, he issued the Edict of Milan, granting freedom to Christian worship throughout the Roman Empire.

Thus Christianity was established as the religion of Rome.

Its structure was reshaped accordingly, and it set forth as a world religion.

After countless sacrifices, the hopes of Stephen and Paul were finally fulfilled.

"…But at that very moment," Bruno said quietly,

"I believe the Scriptures were rewritten."

"First, Jesus himself.

"He was placed on equal footing with God, as the only begotten Son.

"In a Rome that had long deified its emperors, the deification of Jesus must have seemed necessary.

"The Sabbath was changed—from the Jewish Saturday to Sunday.

"Likely a concession to Roman sun worship.

"And most importantly—

"the teaching that 'man is reborn'—that is, reincarnation—was removed."

"It would not do," Bruno continued, "for kings or popes to have been shepherds or beggars in their previous lives.

"And after Christ, anyone who claimed to hear the voice of God was branded as Satan.

"For if voices of God arose outside the Church, its authority would collapse."

"This," Bruno said,

"is the origin of the Catholicism that reached your land."

"But do not forget, Thomas—

Christianity did not spread to Rome alone.

There were also those who fled to Egypt,

and those who remained in Jerusalem."

"The group that remained in Jerusalem, after enduring conflict with Judaism, was eventually absorbed into it.

And when the Jewish kingdom fell to Rome, they disappeared.

But those who fled to Egypt—

centered perhaps around Mary Magdalene—

preserved the words of Jesus.

They later became intertwined with Gnostic thought.

They influenced Zoroastrian traditions, gave rise to Manichaeism, and in turn influenced Christianity itself.

Through many transformations, they grew into a force that would one day threaten Roman Catholicism.

From this stream, the Cathars—later called the greatest heresy of Christianity—would emerge."

"Was not Mary Magdalene," Thomas asked,

"a prostitute whom Jesus saved?"

"That is only what Rome claims," Bruno replied.

"Nowhere is it written that she was a prostitute.

"Rather, she stood closest to Jesus.

She supported him—not only in daily life, but even in what you might call his ministry.

She may well have come from a wealthy background.

But more than that—

it is possible that she stood in the position of his wife."

"A wife…? I cannot believe that."

"Why not?" Bruno said sharply.

"Because he is the Son of God?

Do you imagine him as some transparent, pure illusion—born of a virgin, untouched by human desire?

A being with no interest in women?"

"…No, that is not what I mean…"

"Jesus rejected the worship of idols," Bruno said.

"And yet the Catholics have turned him into an idol—and placed him upon a pedestal."

"…Thomas, listen.

In Judaism, not taking a wife is considered a sin.

For a man not to fulfill his role as a husband is seen as unnatural.

If Jesus had not taken a wife, do you not think that fact would have been clearly recorded?

And yet, every account of his life is silent on this matter.

That silence itself suggests that Jesus lived as any ordinary man would—taking a wife."

Bruno paused, then continued.

"And that is not all.

When Jesus was crucified, the men—the twelve apostles led by Peter—denied him and fled.

It was the women, centered around Mary Magdalene, who remained and witnessed his final moments.

And every Gospel tells us this:

When Jesus rose again, the angel did not first announce his resurrection to the apostles,

but to Mary Magdalene.

And it was to her that the resurrected Jesus first appeared…

Is that not so, Thomas?"

"Yes," Thomas replied quietly.

"When Mary Magdalene heard the voice of the angel and went to the tomb where Jesus had been laid,

the great stone sealing the entrance had been moved…

and his body was no longer there."

"Exactly," said Bruno.

"And what do you think that means?"

"……."

"The compilers of the Scriptures could not ignore Mary Magdalene—

her role, her position.

There were still many at the time who knew who she truly was to Jesus.

She must have been the one closest to him.

To Peter and the others, she may well have been someone before whom they could not raise their heads."

"After the death of Jesus," Bruno continued,

"the disciples gathered and spoke of what he had taught.

They sought to preserve his teachings in words.

That was the beginning of what you now call the New Testament.

Among those early records, there even existed something called the Gospel of Mary—

a text that conveyed the living voice of Jesus in a way unknown to you.

And the words recorded there were not those of his mother,
but of Mary—his wife—who spoke of what he had said."

"Tragically," Bruno said, lowering his voice,
"conflict arose over his teachings.
Between the group led by Peter
and the group centered around Mary Magdalene."

"If one wished to preserve Christianity as an organized religion,
the raw and living voice of Jesus may have seemed too idealistic—
too difficult to realize,
too dangerous to preserve in full.
When Peter and the others spoke,
might they not have been met with words like:
'What right have you to speak, you who fled?
Who do you think remained with him to the very end?'"

"The Roman Catholic Church's tendency to diminish women,
to treat them as inferior,
even to brand them as witches—
might it not arise from that very sense of guilt
carried by those male disciples?"

"It seems to me," Bruno went on,
"that Stephen—and Thomas—were drawn to Mary

Magdalene.

Stephen, who had never known Jesus in life,

would naturally have been captivated by one who carried his living voice.

And even among the disciples who had known Jesus,

those who heard him closely may have believed

that Mary alone preserved his words faithfully.

While Peter and James, concerned with survival,

chose to close their eyes to certain teachings."

"Thomas, who fled persecution and went to Egypt,

may well have carried forward the teachings based on the Gospel of Mary.

From that stream, influencing the mystics,

the Gospel of Thomas may have been born."

Bruno spoke all this in one breath.

For Thomas—and even for Bartolomeo—

these were words they had never heard before.

Bartolomeo trembled, overcome with emotion.

His voice, when he tried to speak, clung to his throat.

"…This is too much.

Even if it were true… I would rather not know.

At least—not in front of our friends in Japan…"

"That is not like a Medici," Bruno said quietly.

"And besides—our friend from Japan seeks to know the truth of the Sixtus Bible.

There is no turning away from this."

"But what does all this have to do with the Sixtus Bible?" Bartolomeo asked.

"When I told you there were Japanese who wished to know about it,

you said—

'Perhaps your mother knows.'

What did you mean by that?"

"…Dawn is near," Bruno murmured.

As if in answer, a faint light began to seep down
onto the stone steps where Thomas and Bartolomeo sat.
Even in the depths of the dungeon,
a thin ray of morning must have reached Bruno
through the small vent above.

"The darkness of night can conceal many things," Bruno said softly.

"But the light of morning reveals all.

Even the guards you have bribed can be silenced only in the dark."

"…You must go now.

Bartolomeo—go first to Florence.
If your Japanese friend's resolve does not waver,
you must arrange for him to meet your mother.
With Cardinal Alessandro's support, it should not be difficult.
After that… we shall meet again.
That is—
if I am still alive."

# Chapter 3
# The Medici Family and the Cathars

## 18

1229

When Thomas and his companions visited Florence, it was the year 1599.

To reach 1229 is to go back another 370 years.

It was April 2 of that year.

The place: Notre-Dame Cathedral in Paris.

The cathedral was not yet complete. Six more years would pass before its full completion, and even then, its newly revealed exterior was still wrapped in scaffolding.

Before its great western portal—overlooking the Seine—a wooden platform had been erected for a public punishment.

Upon it knelt a man, stripped to the waist.
Before him stood a papal legate sent from Rome.
A whip lashed down across the man's bare back.
His face flushed—not merely from pain,
but from humiliation and rage.

The legate demanded that he swear obedience to the Pope.
Even as the oath was forced upon him,
the whip continued to strike without mercy.
The legate leaned close, as if savoring
the man's hatred and humiliation.

The man was Raymond VII, Count of Toulouse.
He ruled vast lands stretching from the foothills of the Pyrenees in the west
to the Mediterranean coast of the Côte d'Azur in the east.

This region was not only expansive—it was wealthy.
It stood at the crossroads of Mediterranean trade,
linking southern commerce to northern Europe.
Its prosperity gave the Count of Toulouse
enough power to rival even the King of France.

For the French crown in the north,
the unification of France was impossible
without subduing this southern region.
Yet "north" and "south" were worlds apart.
Their cultures differed completely.
Even their language reflected this divide:
• In the north, the word for "yes" was "oui"
• In the south, it was "oc"

Thus, southern France came to be called Languedoc—
the land of the language of "oc"—
a region distinct in identity from the north.

But why, then, was such a powerful lord
being subjected to this degrading punishment
and forced to swear submission to Rome?

The answer lay in religion.
Southern France had long been a stronghold of the Cathar movement.
Because it stood along major trade routes,
Muslims, Jews, and Christians passed through and settled there.
This created a culture of religious tolerance.

To people accustomed to the corruption of Catholic clergy,
the Cathars' lives of strict simplicity and purity felt fresh and authentic.
They never forced their beliefs upon others.
Those who understood would follow.
Those who did not—simply had not yet reached that time.

Unlike the Catholic Church,
they did not condemn wealth itself as sin.
This attitude resonated deeply
with merchants and nobles in a region built on commerce.

As a result, Cathar teachings spread rapidly.

At this time, Europe was filled with what the Vatican called "heresies."

Among them, the Cathars stood apart:

• highly organized

• long-lasting

• with their own bishops, liturgy, and doctrine

By the late 12th century, they had grown into what Rome regarded as:

"the most dangerous, the most powerful, and the most corrupting heresy."

For the Vatican, this could not be tolerated.

If allowed to persist,

its authority—and its entire system of control—would collapse.

And the most difficult region to subdue

was precisely this land of southern France.

Local lords, including Raymond's father,

did not blindly persecute the Cathars.

Instead, they often hosted public debates between orthodox and heretical thinkers.

These gatherings were:

• openly held

• judged by appointed arbiters

• conducted without interference

The goal was not suppression,
but the pursuit of truth through dialogue.
And more often than not,
the Cathars emerged as the more persuasive side.

Even more damaging to the Church:
lavishly dressed Catholic clergy
were often defeated in debate
by simply clothed Cathar women known for their virtue.

The people, witnessing this,
began turning away from the Catholic Church.

Among these southern lords,
the most powerful was Raymond VI,
father of the man now being whipped—Raymond VII.

In January 1208,
the Vatican sent a papal legate, Pierre de Castelnau,
to confront Raymond VI.
But in a shocking turn of events,
the legate was assassinated near the Rhône River.
Though no definitive proof existed,
the blame fell upon Raymond's followers.

This became the pretext.
The Church had already declared:
• heresy = treason
• supporters of heresy = subject to land confiscation

The Pope called upon the King of France
to launch a crusade into Languedoc.
For the French crown, this was an opportunity.
For the Vatican, a necessity.
Their interests aligned.

Thus, in July 1209,
the first crusade against fellow Christians—
not Muslims—began its march south from Lyon.
This was the Albigensian Crusade.

It lasted twenty years.
The land was devastated.
The people exhausted.
Leadership changed hands:
• Raymond VI → Raymond VII
• King Philip Augustus → young Louis IX

At last, negotiations began.
But despite the south not being decisively defeated,

Raymond VII was betrayed.

At Meaux, during peace talks:
• he was imprisoned
• his companions taken hostage
• and forced to sign the Treaty of Meaux

The terms were brutal:
• his lands reduced by more than half
• enormous reparations imposed
• dozens of castles dismantled
• French troops stationed across remaining territories

Catholic orthodoxy was enforced.
A university was established in Toulouse
to promote Catholic education—
funded by Raymond himself.

But the most devastating condition was this:
His daughter Jeanne—only nine years old—
was to marry the brother of King Louis IX.
Through her, the lands would pass into royal hands.

In effect, his domain was absorbed into France.

After signing this humiliating treaty

and swearing lifelong loyalty to both crown and Church,
Raymond VII was brought to Paris—
and publicly whipped before Notre-Dame.

A chronicle records:
"To see a man who had resisted so many powers for so long,
brought barefoot in shirt and drawers before the altar—
it was a pitiable sight."

Around that same time,
a boy named Thomas was placed in a monastery in Paris.
He was Raymond's son—
twin brother to Jeanne.

Born deaf and mute,
he had been sent away at age three
to live quietly with a nurse's family—
his parents hoping he might live a peaceful life as a farmer.

But the French authorities demanded otherwise.
Even the faint possibility that Thomas might inherit land
could not be allowed.

And so, he too was taken—
and confined within a Cistercian monastery in Paris.

Raymond never forgot this humiliation.

Yet even with brutal persecution
and a system of informants,
the Cathars could not be eradicated.

Fourteen years after the end of the first crusade,
a second and even more brutal conflict would begin—
centered on the fortress of Montségur.

Raymond VII's unfortunate son Thomas remained at Chaalis Abbey, north of Paris, until the age of sixteen.

Chaalis was a Cistercian monastery founded in 1136 by King Louis VI, known as Louis the Fat. Louis IX—later called Saint Louis—was also said to have visited it frequently.

Although the first Albigensian Crusade had ended in victory for the French crown, the Cathars had still not been swept from southern France, despite the system of informers and the harsh investigations of the Inquisition.

And now, using the continuing Cathar threat as a background, Raymond VII—who considered the Treaty of Meaux unjust—had once again raised a large-scale rebellion. England even gave support to this uprising.

This time, the rebellion had somehow been suppressed.

Yet as long as southern France remained a smoldering ember, there was no knowing when England, watching France with

hungry eyes, or Frederick II, Holy Roman Emperor—known as the Antichrist—might bare their fangs.

Southern France had to be brought under control.

And for that, the Cathars had to be eradicated.

The elimination of the Cathars was both a goal in itself and the great pretext for subduing the south.

For this reason, Louis, together with the Vatican, began supporting the Cistercians as a force to oppose the Cathars.

Yet the Cistercians, Franciscans, and Dominicans whom the Vatican set against the Cathars had not originally been the Vatican's spearhead.

At first, they had appeared on the stage of history by attacking the corruption of Catholic clergy and the Church itself.

The Cistercians, for example, are said to have begun in the early eleventh century at Cîteaux in Burgundy, in opposition to older monasteries that had fallen into luxury.

The Cistercian movement then gained support among people in northern Europe who, likewise disgusted by clerical corruption, helped it grow into a force of considerable political power.

Around the same time, the Franciscan and Dominican orders were born, also opposing the luxury of clergy and churches.

Orders that criticized the splendor of the Church and denounced Catholic priests wrapped in fine garments and sunk in gluttony might easily have been branded heretical, just like the Cathars.

But the Vatican did not suppress these orders.

Instead, it officially recognized them as Catholic religious orders and used their members as inquisitors, turning them into forces to oppose the Cathar heresy spreading across southern Europe.

The older Catholic orders no longer possessed either the strength or the popularity needed to resist the Cathars.

Perhaps it was a matter of fighting poison with poison.

The strategy worked.

In these monasteries, study flourished:

What is heresy?

What is orthodoxy?

How can one distinguish heresy?

How can heretics be converted?

Armed with such theory, these orders gradually became the Catholic Church's spearhead, playing a major role in detecting and eradicating the Cathars and other heretics.

It was in such a Cistercian monastery—Chaalis Abbey, under the protection of Louis IX—that Thomas spent the most sensitive years of his life.

What saved Thomas was the abbot.

He was less a religious zealot than a scholar by temperament.

He was not cold toward Thomas's physical handicap; rather, he was sympathetic.

He taught Thomas, who could neither hear nor speak, to form words by learning the shapes of the mouth.

Thomas did learn to speak, in a manner of sorts.

But his speech ignored accent and came out in a loud, unnatural voice. At times, it made him seem almost simple-minded.

Yet in inverse proportion to that outward appearance, Thomas's mind became a treasure house of knowledge:

theology, philosophy, history, rhetoric—everything.

The abbot sought to compensate for Thomas's inability to hear through reading and writing.

After Thomas was taught to speak by watching the movements of the mouth, the abbot personally trained him as a copyist.

He taught Thomas to turn the shapes of letters into sound.

Thomas would look at a letter, then at the abbot's mouth, and imitate the sound.

Once he could do that, he would copy the letter.

This was repeated every day.

In time, Thomas became a scribe.

At first, strange sounds flowed continually from the library as Thomas practiced. The other monks endured it patiently.

Eventually, Thomas learned to copy without speaking the letters aloud.

But the peace Thomas had known came to an end.

When he was sixteen, the abbot died.

The new abbot hated everything Thomas did.

He loved beauty.

God had made man in His own image; therefore, he reasoned, beautiful human beings were closest to God.

The ugly and the physically imperfect were, by that fact alone, cursed by God.

To him, Thomas's habit of constantly peering at people's mouths was ugly—almost grotesque.

His speech was not beautiful. It was painful to hear.

To the new abbot, such behavior could only be the mark of one whose heart had been seized by Satan.

The abbot said of Thomas:

"If you cast Satan out of yourself, your deafness and muteness should naturally be healed.

One who remains as he is, clinging to such affliction, is a sinful man who draws Satan near—no, who refuses to release him.

Do you know what your father is doing to the Church and to His Majesty King Louis?

It is the work of Satan.

You must atone for it."

And so, at every opportunity, the abbot had Thomas whipped.

He also imposed upon Thomas the mortification of whipping himself morning and evening.

"Whip yourself and beg God for forgiveness.

Confess to God what you and your father have done.

Pain and blood will one day purify that sin."

Thomas resolved to escape the monastery.

It was neither castle nor prison. Escaping would not be difficult.

Once vespers ended and everyone was asleep, he could slip away.

He would head south, even if he had to beg along the road.

Would returning to his father cause trouble?

His father, Raymond, had rebelled in protest against the Treaty of Meaux, but had been crushed.

King Henry III of England, who had come to his aid, fled to Bordeaux. Raymond was forced once more to swear that he would faithfully carry out the Treaty of Meaux, and his life was spared.

This was the so-called Peace of Lorris, in October 1242.

If the son held as hostage were now to flee back to him…

No. He could not return to his father.

And yet he could not endure remaining here.

He did not want to stay another day.

Feeling guilty toward his father, Thomas stuffed into his mouth the few scraps he had stolen from the refectory and slipped out of the monastery.

But the moment he escaped, he encountered a mounted party.

He was seized at once.

"A monk out at this hour? Planning to go woman-hunting in the village?"

"I… am… not… sus…pi…cious…"

"What kind of speech is that? Of course you are suspicious. My lord, what shall we do? Shall we kill him?"

"There is little glory in cutting off a monk's head.

Besides, the very reason we came here was to meet this man.

He must be Thomas, Raymond's son.

What say you, monk?"

In the darkness, Thomas desperately stared at the knights' mouths.

He thought he had seen the word Thomas.

Did they know his name?

"To…mas. Thomas!"

"Do not shout. You will wake everyone. We came here in secret, after all."

The man's name was Louis IX.

It was his first visit since the new abbot's appointment. But since he had come only after the monks had fallen asleep, with just a small escort, it did not seem to be a pilgrimage.

"Do not kill him.

This man has work to do.

We came to this monastery tonight because of him.

And to meet him at once like this…"

Louis intended to send Thomas to Montségur.

Montségur was the spiritual center of Cathar life.

After the Treaty of Meaux, a system of informers had been introduced. The crime of heresy extended even to family

members, and if someone was discovered to have been a heretic even after death, the grave would be opened, the corpse dragged through the town as a warning, and then burned.

Persecution of the Cathars had become fierce.

And yet, neither the Vatican nor France had been able to eradicate them from Languedoc.

One reason was that Raymond VII, lord of the region, had shown little zeal in suppressing the Cathars.

Another was that the severity of outside inquisitors inflamed the local people's attachment to their homeland and their desire for independence. As a result, even local Catholic religious orders turned away from the slogan of "eradicating heresy."

Ignoring the local orders, the Vatican had begun sending mainly Dominicans into Languedoc as inquisitors.

By contrast, the Cathars were tightly bound together.

People helped and protected one another, trying to endure the storm of persecution.

But as the Inquisition grew harsher day by day, they eventually gathered at Montségur as the final stronghold of their faith.

Montségur had originally been the domain of Raymond de Péreille, a vassal of the Count of Foix.

Around thirty years earlier, at the request of the Cathars, this castle—then little more than a ruin—had been made available for their use.

The restoration of the castle was paid for by the Cathars, and its design was said to reflect their own ideas.

Thanks to its position as a natural fortress, surrounded on all sides by towering cliffs, Montségur had remained a safe place of faith even during the first Albigensian Crusade.

Under the harsh regime of the Inquisition, the Cathars established Montségur as the last fortress in which the strength of their believers could be concentrated and the flame of faith kept alive.

One day in 1232, leading members of the Cathar movement visited the lord of the castle.

They pleaded earnestly that Montségur be made, definitively, the center of the Cathar faith.

To agree was to risk being seen as a rebel against the King of France.

The lord hesitated for a long time.

At last, he gave his consent.

From then on, those fleeing the Inquisition, along with knights and Cathar clergy, began to settle at Montségur.

The castle was rebuilt, and the Cathar movement was reorganized in both personnel and structure.

Montségur became, in name and reality, the heart of their faith—a place where Cathar teaching was strictly preserved, and their final stronghold.

It is said that, during this period, more than a thousand

believers risked danger to visit Montségur from all over Languedoc.

Many were brought there even as they lay near death.

To receive, at the hands of a renowned Perfect, the proper final rite of consolation—

to "die at Montségur"—

became the greatest joy of the faithful.

The fortress rising upon its sheer rock became, as it were, an ark amid raging waves.

It was the spiritual center toward which the eyes of the southern people were drawn.

And it was to this Montségur that Louis intended to send Thomas.

The fact that Thomas was the hidden son of Count Raymond would make the plan easier.

Louis did not intend to make him a spy.

There was only one thing he wanted from Thomas:

to come back alive.

Louis, after consulting with Rome, had already decided to dispatch the Second Albigensian Crusade.

He did not intend to lose.

It might take time, but he would not lose.

What concerned Louis was not the battle itself, but what would come after it.

Southern France had to be brought into the system of royal rule.

Without that, there could be no unification of France.

To do so, he had to understand the Cathars.

He had to know what had moved the hearts of the people of southern France—their lords, their knights, their common folk.

The true son of Count Raymond, unacknowledged because he was deaf and mute, had been placed in Chaalis Abbey near Paris.

When Louis learned of this, the plan came to him.

He said to Thomas:

"Do you wish to escape this monastery?"

Thomas nodded silently.

"Where do you intend to go?"

"……"

"You have not even thought where you will flee?

Then I command you.

Flee to Montségur.

Live among the Cathars there.

Learn from them well.

But I forbid you to die.

Before long, we will attack Montségur.

It will be a fierce battle.

But whatever happens, you must not die.

You will return alive before me."

Then, as if casually remembering, Louis added:

"Come to think of it, Jeanne, who is married to my brother, is

your twin sister, is she not?

If you die, who knows what may become of Jeanne?

People often say it, do they not?

Twins are of one body and soul."

For an instant, a faint shadow of hatred crossed Thomas's face.

It was never wise to show hatred or anger before one who held power.

Thomas hurriedly concealed his feelings.

Louis tossed a small pouch before him.

"For your immediate expenses.

Thomas.

You understand what I have said.

You need do nothing else.

Only flee to Montségur.

Live with the Cathars.

Listen to them.

Feel what they feel.

And return to me alive.

That is the role you are to play from now on."

Thomas lowered his head timidly.

He picked up the pouch, backed away for a time, then fled as if escaping.

"My lord," one of the men asked, "do you truly think he

understood?"

"He is not the fool you imagine him to be.

…Now then, since I have met Thomas, I have no further business with this monastery.

Still, since we have come all this way, we may as well rest.

It will soon be time for Matins.

If they notice Thomas is gone and begin making a fuss, that would be troublesome.

We should speak to the abbot before they discover it."

"With that man, my lord, he will likely rejoice that a nuisance has been removed."

## 19

### Florence, April 1599

The city of Florence is divided broadly into north and south by the Arno River.

The city's principal district lies to the north, on the right bank of the Arno. There stand many of Florence's most famous buildings: the great Duomo, symbol of the city; the Palazzo Vecchio, center of political power; the monastery of San Marco; the church of Santa Maria; and many others.

The Medici family's Laurentian Library, which would serve as the base of activity for Thomas and his companions in Florence,

was also located in this northern district.

More than a month had passed since Thomas and the others had slipped into Castel Sant'Angelo.

Spring was beginning to show itself in Rome when a personal letter arrived for Pope Clement VIII from Ferdinando I, Grand Duke of Tuscany.

In the letter, Ferdinando hinted that Henry IV of France and Queen Marguerite would soon bring a suit for divorce, and asked that, when the time came, the matter be handled favorably.

At the end, he added that he wished very much to show the Japanese students the Laurentian Library, and asked that they be sent to Florence at the earliest opportunity.

There was no doubt that Cardinal Alessandro had been working behind the scenes in Ferdinando's wish to invite the Japanese students to Florence and show them the Medici collections.

Yet it also cannot be denied that Ferdinando himself may have felt some rivalry toward his brother Francesco I, who had once welcomed the boys of the Tenshō Embassy from Japan.

Francesco had died suddenly with his wife Bianca only a few months after receiving those envoys. His death was said to have been caused by food poisoning or malaria, but the theory that he was poisoned by his younger brother Ferdinando may well be closer to the truth.

As for Queen Marguerite mentioned in the letter, she was the

daughter of Catherine de' Medici, who had married from the Medici family into the French royal house.

Marguerite's marriage to Henry IV had originally been a political union meant to reconcile the conflict in France between Huguenot Protestants and Catholics.

But after the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre and countless other upheavals, Henry had finally gained the throne by converting from Huguenot Protestantism to Catholicism. For him, Marguerite's political value had now diminished.

Worse, as a barren queen unable to produce an heir, she had become an inconvenience.

In France, no matter how many children a king might have by his mistresses, the Salic law allowed succession only through the children of a lawful queen.

For Henry, then, the urgent task was to divorce Marguerite as soon as possible and take a queen who could bear an heir.

How would the Medici move?

If the divorce were to be granted, then the Medici family would need to send another Medici woman as the new queen of France.

Unless that condition were satisfied, the divorce should not be recognized.

Now that Catherine de' Medici was dead, if even her daughter Marguerite lost the position of French queen, the Medici would lose the foothold in France they had worked so hard to build.

As for Pope Clement VIII, he had barely begun to feel relief

after Henry's conversion to Catholicism when Henry issued the Edict of Nantes, guaranteeing freedom of worship and civil rights to the Huguenots.

It was only natural that Clement should feel alarmed—Was his conversion merely a façade?—and conclude that he must join with the Medici to keep firm control over France.

Whether the Medici still possessed such power was another matter.

But for Ferdinando, head of the Medici family, the Pope's mistrust of France was something to be used.

Only the Pope of Rome could decide whether Henry's divorce was valid.

In plain terms, if Henry intended to take a new French queen from outside the Medici family, then his divorce from Marguerite should not be granted.

Such circumstances and calculations lay hidden behind Ferdinando's letter to Clement VIII.

Perhaps influenced by Clement's expectations of the Medici, permission for Thomas and Miguel to travel to Florence was granted at once.

Moreover, Bartolomeo, himself of the Medici line, was assigned to accompany them as guide.

"What does Oltrarno mean?"

Miguel asked, but Bartolomeo remained silent.

Walking ahead of them was Armeni, the attendant Cardinal

Alessandro had sent from Rome to serve also as their bodyguard.

Normally, Armeni was cheerful—almost carefree—and hardly the sort of man to concern himself with others' feelings. Yet now he seemed unusually attentive to Bartolomeo's mood, and answered almost as if speaking on his behalf.

"The southern side of Florence is called Oltrarno. It means 'beyond the Arno'—oltre, beyond, and Arno.

"In the past, living on the south bank of the Arno was considered somewhat lowly. But the wife of Cosimo I suffered from tuberculosis, and it was thought that the climate on the south bank was gentler and better for her health. If she lived there, she might recover. So the Pitti Palace was purchased, and the ducal residence was moved there.

"That was about fifty years ago. Since then, this district is said to have developed rapidly."

Listening to Armeni's explanation, Thomas and Miguel crossed the Ponte Vecchio to the south, then walked westward along the Arno.

The Monastery of Onofrio, their destination, was supposed to be on the western edge of this Oltrarno district.

They had not told Grand Duke Francesco where they were going.

Cardinal Alessandro had warned them firmly:

"When you go to the Monastery of Onofrio, you must be absolutely sure not to tell Grand Duke Francesco."

That morning, when the four had said they wished to walk through Florence, the abbot of the San Lorenzo monastery where

they were staying had urged them:

"Lord Francesco has instructed me to see that you go by carriage."

But they were tired of day after day of receptions and guided visits. They politely declined, saying they wished to walk through Florence on their own feet, and slipped out almost as if escaping.

Yet as they drew closer to their destination, Bartolomeo's expression grew harder and harder.

Is Bartolomeo not happy to see his mother? Thomas wondered.

Ever since arriving in Florence, Bartolomeo had seemed strange.

Even today, just before they were to depart, he had said, "I cannot go. The three of you should go without me."

It had taken all three of them to coax him out.

When Thomas looked back, he saw that Bartolomeo had once again fallen far behind the others.

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The day at the Monastery of Onofrio began at 1:45 in the morning.

After rising, the nuns performed manual work and observed the offices of Prime and Terce, continuing until the Mass at eight o'clock. Then came reading, Sext, and the midday meal at eleven. After lunch, there was a period of roughly two hours for sleep.

Since the abbess had been informed in advance of the request to meet Eleonora, she assigned this midday rest period to the meeting with Thomas, Bartolomeo, and the others.

The meeting place was the cloister, which might be called the living room of the monastery.

The word claustrum, meaning cloister, was often used to refer to a monastery itself. Such was the inseparable place the cloister held in monastic life.

It opened onto the inner courtyard, and the shadows cast by the light streaming in from there created a distinctive atmosphere.

At times, the cloister became a place for reading.

At times, for practicing hymns.

At times, for meditation.

And when necessary, even for conversation.

Thomas and the others were told to wait on a long bench used for washing feet, set in one corner of the cloister.

Because this was a convent—and because the Monastery of Onofrio, though not openly acknowledged as such, was known as a place where women guilty of adultery were confined—only three visitors were permitted:

Bartolomeo, as Eleonora's son,

and Thomas and Miguel, for the special reason that they had come from Japan.

Armeni, their attendant, was made to wait outside.

Thomas and Miguel sat down on the bench and felt relief at the sight of the greenery in the courtyard.

The city of Florence was covered everywhere with stone: streets, walls, squares.

For the two Japanese, who were used to feeling earth beneath their feet and seeing greenery around them, the walled urban landscape felt somehow suffocating and strangely unsettling.

For that reason, the smell of soil and the dazzling green of the garden in the monastery courtyard felt like a blessing.

Before them, Bartolomeo paced back and forth in irritation.

Before long, Eleonora, Bartolomeo's mother, appeared, accompanied by the abbess.

She had been thirty when her husband Carlo placed her in this monastery. Twenty-one years had already passed.

The beauty that had once captivated Cosimo I and even stirred the affections of his son Piero had now begun to fade.

And yet, perhaps because of twenty years of inward reflection,

there seemed to flow from her a gentle warmth that embraced those around her.

"I will return for you in one hour," the abbess said. "The chapter room is free. You may prefer to speak there."

Her words were brisk, yet filled with quiet consideration. Then she withdrew.

Left behind, Thomas and Miguel remained standing awkwardly beside the bench, unsure how to begin.

As for Bartolomeo, on whom they had been relying, he had turned his back as though sulking.

When his father Carlo was imprisoned for violently attacking a servant who had demanded unpaid wages, Carlo, from within prison, had arranged for his wife Eleonora to be placed in the Monastery of Onofrio—known for confining women accused of adultery—as if that were the only revenge still available to him.

At that time, Eleonora took into the monastery only the two young girls Carlo had fathered with a maidservant, raising them herself.

Bartolomeo, still only two years old, was placed in a foundling home along with his brothers.

After he became old enough to understand things, Bartolomeo often thought:

If only I had been a girl…

If he had been, perhaps his mother would have taken him into the monastery too, and raised him by her side.

He understood, or tried to understand.

And yet, no matter how often he told himself, It could not be helped. It could not be helped, he could never fully rid himself of the feeling that he had been abandoned.

Eleonora looked at Bartolomeo's back with affection.

Then, turning to Thomas and the others, she said:

"What shall we do? Shall we speak in the chapter room?"

"N-no… If possible, I would like to look at the garden."

Thomas finally managed to speak.

Eleonora smiled gently.

"Then let us walk a little along the cloister as we talk."

When Eleonora was told that a young Japanese man would be visiting her together with her son Bartolomeo, she felt something like fate.

She had first learned of the Japanese fifteen years earlier, about seven years after she had been placed in the Monastery of Onofrio.

Grand Duchess Bianca, who felt sympathy for Eleonora's fate, had pressured the Church to allow her to attend the reception in Pisa for the Japanese boy envoys.

Her reasoning was forced, but effective:

"During their stay in Pisa, the boys will need a nun to look after them. Male priests alone will not notice the small things."

It was Eleonora's first outing in seven years of confinement.

And not merely an outing—a carriage journey to Pisa.

There she met the Japanese boys.

And from that moment began her deeper connection with Cardinal Alessandro, who had been sent as papal legate, and with Grand Duchess Bianca.

Now another young Japanese man was coming to her.

And concerning the Sixtus Bible.

Eleonora wanted to tell everything.

Not only about the Bible, but also about the many turns of fate that had befallen her—

how bitterly she had resented them,

how deeply she had cursed them.

She wanted to tell it all.

For her son Bartolomeo, knowing such things might be cruel.

And for a Japanese Christian aspiring to the priesthood, it might become a stumbling block rather than any form of encouragement.

Even so, for some reason, she felt she had to speak.

Once she resolved to do so, a strangely refreshing feeling came over her.

It was a feeling she had never experienced, no matter how much she had confessed, no matter how much she had prayed to God.

As though she were being released from the bondage that had held her all these years.

"I was born in Florence in 1548, the daughter of Luigi Messer

degli Albizzi, a Florentine nobleman, and my mother Nanina.

"My godmother was Grand Duchess Eleonora, wife of Duke Cosimo.

"But Lady Eleonora died soon after becoming my godmother.

"Perhaps that was fortunate for her.

"After all, she could never have imagined that the baby girl to whom she gave her own name would one day become her husband's mistress."

"By Lord Cosimo," Miguel asked with innocent curiosity, "do you mean the man who founded the Medici family's power and made Florence into the city of art it is today? I have heard he was something like the benefactor of Florence.

"But was that not more than a hundred years ago?"

Eleonora had begun speaking of her own life, and Miguel's question was entirely natural.

The origins of the Medici family are unknown.

They emerged from Mugello, near Florence, and by the thirteenth century began rapidly to rise within Florentine society. But before that, almost nothing is certain.

One story says they had been charcoal burners in Mugello. Yet how they rose from there into Florentine society is unclear. It is as if they suddenly appeared out of the fog of the Middle Ages.

The same mystery surrounds the Medici coat of arms: several red balls, or palle, set against a field of gold.

Some say that, as the name Medici suggests, there had once been physicians or apothecaries among their ancestors, and that the red balls represent pills. Others say the balls refer to the banking business that made the Medici fabulously wealthy—that they represent coins, or the weights used by money changers.

But there is no definite proof for either explanation.

What is known is this:

The Medici family made its fortune in Florence through moneylending, then expanded its wealth by investing in land and real estate. Eventually, different branches of the family entered banking, politics, and trade. Each rose and declined in turn, until Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici laid the foundation for their prosperity in the fifteenth century.

"Giovanni had two sons," Eleonora said.

"The elder was Cosimo—the man you have heard of as the benefactor of Florence. His younger brother was Lorenzo. From them, the Medici family divided into the elder line and the younger line.

"Cosimo desired not merely the prosperity of the Medici, but the prosperity of Florence itself.

"He revitalized the economy of the Florentine Republic, built churches, nurtured artists, and brought into this dark world a city of art where flowers seemed to bloom in profusion.

"He wanted Florence to be a city where human talent could flourish—in commerce, painting, sculpture, architecture, music,

and learning.

"He believed that human talent revealed the world of God, and could uncover the secrets of the universe.

"That dream of Cosimo was passed on to his son Piero, and then to Piero's son Lorenzo."

"Lorenzo was also the name of Cosimo's younger brother, was it not?" Miguel asked.

"Yes. I have heard that Lorenzo was named after his uncle.

"This Lorenzo—and his younger brother Giuliano—were the final brilliance of the declining Florentine Republic.

"After Giuliano was assassinated in the Pazzi conspiracy, Florence lost its radiant brightness and became a city where dark shadows always seemed to linger.

"Lorenzo struggled desperately to hold back that current, but he too eventually died.

"And then Florence—no, Italy itself—became the stage upon which great powers such as France, Spain, and Austria fought for supremacy.

"With Lorenzo's death, Florence's freedom and independence began to vanish."

Lorenzo, called the Magnificent, died in 1492 at the age of forty-three.

Machiavelli ended his History of Florence with Lorenzo's death, and in truth, that death also marked the collapse of Medici

rule in Florence.

Piero, who succeeded him, was handsome but mediocre—unfit for an age of upheaval.

When Charles VIII invaded Italy, Piero's arbitrary and shortsighted policies brought disaster. The Florentine government finally declared the Medici family permanently banished.

"All this must be complicated and tedious for you, coming from Japan," Eleonora said.

"No," Thomas replied. "We have similar things in Japan as well. I understand."

"Yes… I suppose it is the same everywhere.

"Men run about in the name of politics and war, and in the end, women are the ones consumed.

"No, I must not wander. Where was I?"

"The Medici had been expelled from Florence."

"Ah, yes.

"But the Medici returned to Florence, borrowing foreign power and the power of the papal court.

"About seventy years ago, imperial and papal forces besieged Florence. After fierce fighting, they installed Alessandro, grandson of Giuliano, as lord of Florence.

"But Alessandro was a terrible tyrant.

"He neglected politics and spent his days in pursuit of women, until in the end he was assassinated by Lorenzaccio, a member of the same Medici family.

"Cardinal Alessandro, who sent you here, is also said to have been one of the orphaned children born from that Alessandro's womanizing."

"That Cardinal Alessandro…"

"Yes.

"And so the rule of Florence passed from the elder line beginning with Cosimo, Giovanni's son, to the younger branch of Cosimo's brother.

"After Alessandro's death, the leading pro-Medici men chose as successor Cosimo, son of Giovanni delle Bande Nere—the Black Bands captain—who was famed as a hero and popular among Florentines.

"Though only seventeen at the time, he showed firm resolve. He thoroughly crushed the anti-Medici faction, took as wife Eleonora, second daughter of Don Pedro de Toledo, Viceroy of Naples and a great noble of Spain, and deepened the alliance with Spain.

"He was spoken of as a precocious absolute ruler.

"Cosimo incorporated even the Tuscan territories dependent upon Florence into the Duchy of Tuscany, and thus became Cosimo I, first Grand Duke of Tuscany."

"So there are two men called Cosimo I," Miguel said, sounding strangely impressed.

"One is Cosimo, the father of the country, who led republican Florence to prosperity.

"And the other is Cosimo I, who created the Duchy of Tuscany."

"Yes.

"But once the Duchy of Tuscany had stabilized, that Cosimo handed the title of Grand Duke to his eldest son, Francesco.

"And after that, his womanizing became terrible…"

A voice spoke within Eleonora's heart.

Do you still hate me?

(If I said I did not, it would be a lie.)

When Grand Duchess Eleonora, my godmother, died, I was only fourteen.

I was sad, yes—but more than that, I was proud to have been allowed to attend such a solemn ceremony.

At fourteen, I tried desperately to stand with dignity, to behave proudly, as though not to be overwhelmed by the majesty of the rite.

And it was you—Grand Duke Cosimo—who noticed me then.

If you had not taken notice of me at that moment, my life might have been different…

I cursed the mad blood of the Medici, the voice replied.

My wife Eleonora hated the licentious Medici bloodline and tried to raise our children with an abnormal purity.

Perhaps in rebellion against that, my daughter Maria fell, while still young, into an illicit love with the nobleman Malatesta.

I could not forgive it.

My own daughter tried desperately to protect the man, and I killed her with my own hands.

The cursed Medici blood began raging within me.

I told my wife that Maria had died of malignant typhus.

But Eleonora died soon afterward, as if following our daughter.

The children left behind—and I myself—were all twisted in some way when it came to desire.

The worst was my third son, Piero.

He became so hated by the people of Florence that they called him "the evil Medici."

At my wife's funeral, I noticed you, grown beautiful.

Behind the surface pride with which you held yourself up so as not to be looked down upon, you shone with a freshness not found in Medici blood.

(Do not make it sound noble!)

As soon as I bore your son, you turned away from me.

Your eldest son, Grand Duke Francesco—the one you despised—had far more truth in him.

He too fell into a forbidden love with Bianca of Venice.

But he remained faithful to that love until the very end.

You were different.

You reached for every beautiful woman you saw, then cast her aside.

And now you try to disguise it as suffering.

How cowardly!

And you can say that?

You, who lay in the arms of that evil Piero?

Piero was my son.

And you—unthinkably—gave your heart to my son Piero.

As if breaking a long silence, Eleonora spoke.

"Bartolomeo, your true father was Piero of the Medici."

"……"

"I was eighteen when I bore a son, Giovanni, to Cosimo.

"Around that time, Cosimo's affections had already shifted to my cousin Camilla.

"It was Piero, Cosimo's son, who spoke kind words to me as I lived in loneliness.

"Eventually, love grew between Piero and me.

"To conceal our relationship, Cosimo married me off to one of his retainers, Carlo.

"Carlo had killed a man in a private duel and had been sentenced to death.

"Cosimo offered him a pardon on the condition that he marry me.

"Carlo married me because he wanted to live.

"But in such a marriage, there could be no love.

"Only hatred, swelling day by day.

"In the midst of that, my relationship with Piero resumed—and you were born.

"Of course, my husband would not acknowledge you as his child.

"His life only grew more violent.

"At last, in a rage, he beat to death a servant who had complained about delayed wages, using a purse filled with copper coins.

"For that crime, Carlo was imprisoned.

"And from prison, he arranged for me to be placed in this monastery.

"It was the only revenge he could take against me."

It was around this time that the friendship between Grand Duchess Bianca of Florence and Eleonora began.

Perhaps Bianca saw her own fate reflected in Eleonora's. She not only visited Eleonora in the monastery and comforted her, but when the Tenshō Embassy from Japan visited Tuscany, she used the pretext that the boys needed a woman to look after them and brought Eleonora out to Pisa.

During the embassy's stay, Eleonora spent five nights with them in Pisa and seven nights in Florence.

Bianca had been born the daughter of the Cappello family, one of the wealthiest and most powerful noble houses in Venice.

Her father, Bartolomeo Cappello, as was common at the time, viewed his daughter—said to be the greatest beauty in Venice—as a tool for the political ambitions of the Cappello family.

But she eloped with Pietro Buonaventuri, a mere bank clerk of Venice.

Furious, her father Bartolomeo had everyone who helped them arrested: Giovanni, Pietro's uncle and branch manager of the Salviati Bank; Bianca's servants; even the gondolier who had

taken part in the escape.

Giovanni, being Pietro's relative and suspected of arranging the elopement, was subjected to severe torture and died in prison.

The two lovers took refuge in Florence with another of Pietro's uncles, Zenobia, who worked there as a notary.

Florence and Venice were bitter rivals.

Throughout Renaissance history, the two states had repeatedly clashed, and precisely because of that, the people of Florence cheered this great elopement scandal with delight.

Thus Pietro and Bianca were secretly married in Zenobia's house.

Before long, their romance became the talk of all Florence.

Crowds came to Zenobia's house, hoping to catch a glimpse of the girl called the greatest beauty in Venice.

Among those curious spectators was Francesco, eldest son of Cosimo I, who would one day succeed his father as ruler of Tuscany.

At the time, Francesco was in the midst of negotiations to marry Joanna, sister of Maximilian II, the Holy Roman Emperor.

Yet during these political marriage negotiations, the rumor of Bianca and Pietro moved him so deeply that he returned from Bavaria to Florence just to see Bianca once.

Fortunately, near Zenobia's house stood the Medici villa known as the Casino de' Medici.

Francesco stayed there, determined to see Bianca.

At last, he succeeded.

And after that, he could not forget her.

Sensing this, his knowing attendants began to persuade Pietro.

"Grand Duke Francesco has noticed Bianca. You should allow him to meet her."

If he did, they said, Pietro would be richly rewarded. And if he gained the Grand Duke's protection, even Venice would no longer be able to touch him.

Pietro himself was rumored to be one of Venice's great libertines. He had begun to tire of Bianca, and above all, he could no longer bear their miserable life.

When service under the Medici and a great reward were promised, it did not take long for Pietro's heart to change.

Everything proceeded without regard for Bianca's feelings.

By then, the title of Grand Duke of Tuscany had passed from Cosimo I to Francesco I. Francesco had already taken the Habsburg Joanna as Grand Duchess of Tuscany.

Thus Bianca was received into the Medici household as Francesco's acknowledged mistress.

But Grand Duchess Joanna was a proud woman who flaunted her Habsburg birth.

Her education was poor, and she could not compare with Bianca, who was called a beautiful jewel of the late Renaissance, both in learning and beauty.

Naturally, Francesco's affections leaned increasingly toward Bianca.

Joanna could not tolerate it.

A passing affair might have been forgivable. But Francesco had loved Bianca even before his marriage, and after marrying Joanna, he showed no sign of stopping.

Joanna complained to her brother, Maximilian II, Holy Roman Emperor.

Maximilian declared the matter "regrettable" and protested to Francesco's father, Cosimo.

Faced with a complaint from the great Habsburg power, Cosimo could not dismiss the matter as a private marital issue. He reproached his son Francesco for his misconduct.

But around the same time, Cosimo himself had taken the fourteen-year-old Eleonora as his mistress.

Francesco accused his father of hypocrisy, and father and son spent their days denouncing one another's sexual misconduct.

This unhappy marriage ended with Joanna's death.

Bianca had taken from her not only her husband, but even popularity in society.

Then came the news that Bianca was carrying Francesco's child.

Joanna had already given birth to a daughter, but because of her health, it was said she would likely bear no more children.

Burning with jealousy, Joanna gave birth the following May to a premature son, as if to defy the rumors.

The following year, she became pregnant again.

Joanna was at the height of triumph.

Now she would show that Venetian woman.

But this shortened her life.

Repeated pregnancies left her severely anemic. One day, when she stood from a chair, she fainted and fell upon the marble floor.

She struck her abdomen hard, suffered heavy bleeding, miscarried, and died without regaining consciousness.

For Bianca, the misfortune came afterward—when Francesco took her as Grand Duchess of Tuscany.

Bianca understood painfully well why Joanna, consumed by jealousy, had shortened her own life.

Joanna had never been permitted to acknowledge her own feelings as a woman. Tossed about as a tool of men's desire and politics, she burned herself to death in jealousy.

And then there was Eleonora—

noticed by Cosimo I, abandoned, forced into an unwanted marriage, and finally thrust into a monastery.

"Lady Bianca carried that sorrow in her heart when she came to the monastery to comfort me.

"Yet Francesco's younger brother, Lord Ferdinando—the present Grand Duke—spread rumors that Bianca had killed Lady Joanna because she wanted to become Grand Duchess.

(Though it was Lord Ferdinando himself who desired the Duchy of Tuscany…)

"In the midst of all this, Lady Bianca met Cardinal Alessandro.

"And through her, I too was given the chance to hear him speak.

"I can never forget it.

"In Pisa, and here in Florence, between the joyful gatherings with the young princes from Japan, I secretly heard from Cardinal Alessandro about Jesus, about Mary Magdalene, and about the great current that seeks to discover what is truly real…"

## 21

To Eleonora, it felt as though everything had begun when those Japanese boys came to Italy.

At the welcoming ball, their faces had flushed bright red as Grand Duchess Bianca led them in dance.

Before long, still filled with excitement, the boys withdrew to their rooms, and the brilliant banquet came to an end.

Late that night, after everyone had gone to sleep, four people gathered in Grand Duke Francesco's study:

Francesco himself,

Grand Duchess Bianca,

Cardinal Alessandro,

and Eleonora.

Francesco spoke to Eleonora.

"This gathering is unofficial. It must never be made public. What is discussed here concerns not only the lives of those present, but the fate of the Medici family itself.

"I have heard about you from my wife, and after consulting with Cardinal Alessandro, I decided that you too should know about us.

No—rather, I believe you have the right to know.

Well, then. Do you have the courage to hear the truth?

Or would you rather end your life knowing nothing?

It would not necessarily be wrong to call that the happier path."

"I do not know what sort of matter this may be," Eleonora replied, "but I cannot imagine my present circumstances becoming any worse than they are. Besides, if you speak to me in such a way, my curiosity will not be quieted. I cannot imagine leaving here without knowing."

Thomas remembered his own first meeting with Cardinal Alessandro.

At that time, Alessandro had spoken in the same way Francesco had just done.

You may come to know things you would rather not know. If you do not have the courage and resolve, then forget the Sixtus Bible.

At that time, Thomas had thought almost the same thing Eleonora now felt.

If anyone could hear this much and still turn back, making peace with his own curiosity, that person would be truly brave.

Thomas and the others could not have known it, but this was something like a rite of entry into a secret gathering.

That gathering was called Incunabula.

The name meant "the cradle of printing."

Its purpose and activity were:

to preserve truth in print;

to collect and protect books from around the world that had been published in the pursuit of truth;

and to support people and groups who sought truth.

On a personal level, it also aimed to help each member discover, through study, the true purpose of life.

Its origins went back to the Platonic Academy founded in the time of the first Cosimo—not Cosimo I, but the elder Cosimo who laid the foundation of Medici greatness.

It is no exaggeration to say that Florence came to be called a city of art because of Cosimo alone.

Cosimo not only fostered many artists as a patron, but also protected philosophers, thinkers, astrologers, alchemists, and all manner of magicians—though these included what we would now call natural scientists, chemists, mathematicians, and musicians.

He protected them financially, and also protected them from the Vatican.

And he himself was a researcher.

The Platonic Academy appeared outwardly to be a salon of philosophers reading and discussing Plato's Symposium.

But its true purpose was to search for the root of what it means to be human.

It sought to uncover the secrets and laws of nature that

surrounded human existence.

And that meant, ultimately, trying to know the secrets of God.

For that purpose, they were not bound by the framework of Christianity.

They studied Greek philosophy, Arab medicine, astrology, alchemy, Kabbalah—Jewish mysticism—and Gnosticism.

All of these were brought into discussion and examined.

Of course, from the Vatican's point of view, such studies were blasphemy.

Yet Cosimo, on the other hand, encouraged artists and architects, praised God through painting and sculpture, and built church after church.

One could view this as camouflage against the Vatican.

But for Cosimo, perhaps this itself was also a challenge to God.

As if to say:

This magnificent church—who built it?

This radiant beauty—who created it?

All of it came from human power, human skill, human sensibility.

"Please wait," Bartolomeo said suddenly. "Something is wrong with Thomas."

Eleonora's son had stopped the flow of the conversation.

Thomas was sweating heavily. His eyes were vacant, and his body trembled in small spasms.

"…I-I am all right. It is only that everything I hear is new to

me… But for some reason, when I heard the word Gnosticism, gooseflesh rose all over my body. Even now I cannot stop trembling. What is this?"

Thomas spoke with difficulty.

"…Most likely," Eleonora said, "it is a memory within you coming to the surface. A memory from before you were born."

"…Do you mean reincarnation? But Christianity denies that…"

"Catholicism denies it, because acknowledging it would be inconvenient. It would not do for a Pope or emperor to have once been a shepherd or a thief. But original Christianity did not deny reincarnation at all."

"Bruno said the same thing," Miguel interjected proudly. "That people are reborn. And that Jesus too was the son of man."

"Yes. At first, there was no Bible and no Church. Even Jesus was not an object of worship. There were only the things Jesus spoke. Only what Jesus tried to teach, and what Jesus was trying to reach."

Eleonora began to speak of the people called Gnostics, who had existed even before Christianity.

The word gnosis means knowledge in Greek.

Above all, these people desired complete knowledge—knowledge capable of explaining the reason for the existence of all things.

It did not stop at faith alone.

Through spiritual intuition, they sought divine revelation and tried to raise themselves to the summit of the world of wisdom.

This naturally led them to regard the body as part of a fallen

material world, and their ultimate aim became the liberation of the soul from the body.

After the death of Jesus, Mary Magdalene—his wife—went about conveying his living voice and living teachings.

Those teachings mingled with the stream of Gnosticism.

From that stream, Manichaeism was eventually born, and later the Cathars, who would come to be called the greatest heresy of Christianity.

This meant that the original teachings of Jesus—indeed, Jesus himself—had been influenced by Gnostic thought.

Among the Gnostics, there was no distinction between men and women.

Women were not despised.

In the Cathar Christianity born from this current, there were no churches and no priests.

There were no imposed rules.

Only those who had awakened to the purpose of their own existence became Perfecti, perfect ones. They abstained from meat, wore simple clothing, lived in poverty, and traveled to teach.

They imposed upon themselves what they never imposed upon others.

Women, too, could become Perfecti.

Indeed, women may be said to have played the leading role.

Even as Catholicism became the center of Christianity, fell into corruption, and grew desperate to preserve its systems and

institutions, the Cathars won the support of the people and spread through their hearts.

Clergy wrapped in splendid robes and living in luxury could never stop that current.

No matter how loudly the Vatican cried, "Cathar teaching is heresy," no one would listen to priests whose words and lives did not match.

In this current, southern France became the greatest stronghold of Cathar activity.

Why southern France…?

In his hazy consciousness, Thomas vaguely wondered.

As he listened, his trembling did not subside. It grew stronger.

And when he heard the word Cathar, something inside him exploded.

A mass surged up from within his chest.

Unable to endure it any longer, Thomas cried out.

As he cried, he listened to a single thought echoing inside him:

Montségur.

Do not forget Montségur.

Thomas… Thomas…

# 22

"Are you absolutely sure we don't need to report this to the police?"

Producer Fuji was speaking into the phone while eating breakfast in his hotel room.

On the other end was Imuta from the art department at the Osaka branch. It must have been past seven in the evening in Japan. Even though he would normally have gone home on a day without filming, today he remained in the office, worried about Yasuo's safety.

In the room with him was his wife, Sayaka. A map of Rome was spread across the cluttered desk, and she was staring intently at it.

"Sayaka says Yasuo is somewhere near Saint Peter's," Imuta explained. "He may not be well, but at least… he's not dead."

"I don't understand," Fuji replied. "How could she possibly know that?"

"It's hard to explain in a single word… but she seems to sense something like Yasuo's 'presence.' She says she can feel his vibrations…"

"Call it 'presence' or 'vibrations,' I don't care—but are you sure about this?"

"…Well…"

Imuta had met his beloved wife Sayaka back when he was still

living in a rundown apartment in Sakai.

Right behind his apartment, across a narrow alley, stood a small strip theater.

From his window, the rooftop of the theater was clearly visible.

One day, he happened to make eye contact with a dancer hanging laundry there, her upper body bare.

At the time, Imuta was still an innocent young man. Blushing furiously, he gave a small bow and ducked below the window.

Even after hiding, however, the image of her well-shaped breasts lingered in his mind. Along with it came the memory of her faint smile and the warmth in her eyes.

He wanted to see her again.

Yet for some reason, he hesitated to enter the strip theater.

I studied art. I'm used to drawing nude figures. A naked woman shouldn't bother me. Why should going to a strip show be any different…?

After much agonizing, he finally convinced himself and went.

At the entrance, photographs of the dancers were displayed.

One caught his eye.

The name "Sayaka" was written beneath it in hiragana.

From that moment on, he began to follow her.

Whenever she went on regional tours, he took time off and traveled to see her performances.

One day, in Kanazawa's Korinbo district, he sat beside a man who shouted vulgar insults at her during her performance.

By then, Imuta had come to see striptease as a form of high art.

"Shut up!" he shouted impulsively.

That was his mistake.

The man had companions. Imuta was dragged outside and beaten severely.

Sayaka, watching from the stage, called the police. An ambulance took Imuta to a nearby hospital, and she accompanied him.

When he woke, more than the pain of his injuries, he was overwhelmed by the fact that she had stayed by his side.

Without thinking, he confessed:

"I want you to quit that job… and marry me."

After that, Imuta gave up his dream of becoming a painter and found purpose in stage design.

And of course, his life with Sayaka became its foundation.

About a year after their marriage, Sayaka asked to attend a certain gathering.

In high school, she had been a delinquent. But meeting a teacher named Furuno had changed her life.

The students called him "Kitchom-sensei," a playful nickname derived from his name, Yoshō Furuno.

Even delinquent students spoke to him affectionately.

Once, Sayaka remembered him quietly saying:

"Your name… your parents gave it to you."

Sayaka's parents had divorced. Her father, who ran a small printing business, fell into financial trouble and turned to a new religion, eventually losing everything.

Her mother left with her younger brother. Sayaka remained behind with her father until relatives took her in.

She had deeply resented her parents. She had cursed her own birth.

And yet, that one sentence—

Your name… your parents gave it to you.

—pierced her heart.

It wasn't logic. It wasn't explanation.

Something broke open within her.

All the anger, loneliness, and pain she had suppressed poured out.

She cried uncontrollably.

And from the depths of that suffering, something unexpected emerged:

Warmth.

Gratitude.

"Thank you, Mother… thank you, Father…"

And beyond that, gratitude toward everything around her.

It was the first time she had ever felt such a thing.

But as time passed, that feeling faded into everyday life.

Years later, at a class reunion, she heard that Kitchom-sensei was now a high school principal and held study meetings every Sunday.

Around that time, Sayaka began to change.

She started seeing things that should not be seen, hearing

things that should not be heard—what people might call "spirits."

Word spread, and researchers of the paranormal and psychology came to study her.

But Sayaka felt uneasy.

Something about it felt wrong.

Then she remembered Kitchom-sensei's study group and decided to attend.

There, he taught:

Human beings are not the body—they are spirit, they are consciousness.

The body is merely clothing worn by that consciousness.

People mistake the clothing for themselves, believing that decorating it is happiness.

When the clothing wears out, they call it "death," believing that they themselves cease to exist.

But in truth, consciousness continues.

The purpose of being born, he said, is to realize that we are not bound to the small physical body, but are an unbroken, living consciousness.

We are burdened by countless mistakes from past lives, and the present exists to correct them.

If we truly heal ourselves, those past lives are also freed from suffering.

And in doing so, we ourselves are liberated.

"Wait a minute," Imuta would often protest. "Isn't that just going in circles?"

Yet somewhere deep inside, he felt:

Maybe she's right.

Despite his doubts, Sayaka continued attending the meetings twice a month, steadily sharpening her sensitivity to the unseen.

Eventually, Imuta told her about Yasuo.

"Madness in the name of religion…"

Such thoughts rose within Sayaka.

And at the same time, something long sealed within her heart burst open.

Tears streamed down her face.

As they did, she directed her thoughts toward Yasuo—

wandering somewhere in distant Rome.

## 23

"Thomas, do you know where the Medici family came from?"

Eleonora's voice pulled Thomas back to reality.

Sensing that he was still not fully awake from whatever vision had overtaken him, her son Bartolomeo spoke up.

"Weren't they originally from Florence?"

"No," Eleonora replied. "They fled from the very place

Thomas had just been thinking about."

"…Montségur?" Thomas asked, his voice heavy.

"Yes. It is said that the Medici rose from Mugello, outside Florence—but in truth, they came here as refugees from southern France."

"Then… are the Medici survivors of the Cathars?" Bartolomeo asked.

"When Montségur fell, not a single treasure of the Cathars remained in the castle. Everything they deemed important—whether material or not—had already been removed during the ceasefire.

Those who preserved the teachings of the Medici, and those who inherited the wealth of the Cathars, divided their roles. And so, the Cathars went underground."

Since Christianity had emerged onto the stage of history, the history of heresy had flowed beneath it like an underground current—sometimes faint, sometimes surging forth into the open.

Now, the current of the Cathars—the greatest heresy in Christian history—was once again rising, this time within Italy… even toward the heart of the Vatican itself.

The misfortune of Thomas and Miguel was that, as Japanese, they had unknowingly been drawn into this struggle.

"There is another Thomas," Eleonora continued. "A monk who lived in the time of the Cathars. This is his record.

Lady Bianca entrusted it to me, and I copied it by hand. I

thought it would decay here with me… but at least this document may yet leave this convent."

She held out a bundle of papers she had been clutching to her chest.

### The Journal of Thomas, a Convert from the Cathars

It has now been nearly a year since I entered the fortress of Montségur.

The battle is reaching its end. The besieging forces have granted us fifteen days to decide whether to accept the terms of surrender.

Taking this opportunity, I shall set down what I have learned of the Cathars, along with the notes I made during the fighting.

After all, that is why I came here.

Recently, stones hurled from siege engines have struck the castle almost daily.

At first they were round projectiles, but as time passed, massive boulders were mixed in. Now, nothing but great rocks rain down upon us.

They fly endlessly over the walls, and the scene within resembles a vision of hell.

The cries of women and children fill the air. In the courtyards, Perfecti administer the consolamentum to knights whose limbs have been torn apart, and to women crushed beneath falling stones.

I have seen corpses whose heads were driven into their

shoulders, helmets and all, by the force of impact.

Of the nearly 250 combatants we once had, fewer than sixty now remain.

Who could have imagined such a fate?

The fortress stands atop the steep mountain of Montségur, surrounded on all sides by near-vertical cliffs. Everyone believed it impregnable.

And indeed, when the crusaders first encircled us last May, bearing the royal banner of France, ten thousand men could do nothing but watch.

For over half a year, they simply maintained the siege—while worrying about their own supplies.

Feeding an army of that size is no small matter.

Meanwhile, we within the fortress had sufficient water thanks to autumn rains, and ample provisions stored in advance.

We could even bring in supplies through hidden paths.

At this rate, we could have withstood a siege for five years.

In fact, had things continued, King Louis's crusade would have been forced to withdraw.

But there was betrayal.

Never did we imagine that a traitor would arise from among the Cathars.

Because of this betrayal, one of the secret paths was discovered.

The attackers then brought in Basque mountain troops and succeeded in capturing an outpost.

Once that fell, siege engines—designed by the Bishop of Albi—were brought up, and stones weighing sixty to eighty pounds were hurled relentlessly at the fortress.

Under such bombardment, it became clear to all that our fall was only a matter of time.

And yet… we held out for two more months.

But when a desperate sortie to destroy the siege engines failed, the leaders of the fortress resolved to seek terms of surrender.

Last night, Pierre Roger and Ramon de Pérella presented the conditions:

• Those who refuse to renounce the Cathar faith shall be burned at the stake.

• All others shall be spared, provided they confess their sins sincerely.

• Combatants may leave freely, bearing their arms.

• No charges shall be brought concerning the Avignonet murders.

• The fortress is to be surrendered in fifteen days.

The Avignonet incident refers to the killing of inquisitors in May 1242.

It was an act of vengeance that stirred great excitement among the people of Languedoc—but it also triggered the Second Albigensian Crusade.

Given that the previous crusade had called for the complete

extermination of the Cathars, these terms were remarkably lenient.

Perhaps not due to the mercy of King Louis, but because the besieging army had grown exhausted after ten months.

That night, Esclarmonde—the daughter of the lord of Montségur and a devout Cathar—confided her resolve to me.

I had known her since arriving here, disguised among the people of Foix.

Montségur is an incredibly steep mountain, rising to a thousand meters. The path to the fortress is harsh.

For me, being both deaf and lame, it was especially difficult.

Because I could not hear, I failed to notice when others tried to encourage me from behind.

They must have thought me rude.

Even those who tried to help grew angry when I did not respond.

I fell behind, climbing alone, until I reached a final ascent too steep for me to manage.

As I stood there in despair, a hand reached down and pulled me up.

It was Esclarmonde.

To my surprise, she was dressed as a knight.

Yet there was no mistake—her hands, her face—they were those of a woman.

She smiled and spoke, but in the darkness I could not read her lips.

"I cannot hear," I told her.

"I could not read your lips in the dark. Please, speak again—slowly."

She opened her mouth wide and said:

"Welcome… to Montségur."

That was how we met.

She once asked me where I had come from.

She said she had never seen me in the town of Foix. And although my speech carried a strange accent, it was clearly not of Languedoc.

Esclarmonde was not only bold like a man—she was also a perceptive and intelligent woman.

I told her that I had fled a monastery in Paris and wandered south, and that I wished to learn more about the Cathars. That was no lie—it was my true feeling.

However, I did not speak of my encounter with King Louis of France, nor of the fact that I was the hidden son of Raymond VII. I thought it would only lead to misunderstanding.

From that day on, Esclarmonde patiently taught me the teachings of the Cathars whenever she could, despite my deafness and my inability to speak properly.

As I listened, a question began to swirl within me:

Was it not the case that Catholic teaching sought less to convey truth than to preserve the authority of the Church—fixing it in visible rituals and the form of the Mass?

"I have decided to receive the Consolamentum."

On the night it was announced that the fortress would be surrendered, Esclarmonde told me this.

The Consolamentum is the rite by which a believer enters the ranks of the Perfecti.

The Cathars rejected all the elaborate churches and sacraments of the Catholics. Only this simple rite remained.

It is performed for those who resolve to devote themselves to God and the Gospel. After confirming their resolve, they must vow:

• To abstain from all food except vegetables and fish prepared with oil—no meat, no cheese

• To speak no falsehood

• To take no oaths

• To renounce bodily relations

• And never to abandon the faith, no matter what form of death threatens them

After these vows, the initiate recites the Lord's Prayer. A Perfect then places a hand upon the initiate's head, sets a book—usually the Gospel—upon it, embraces them, and kneels before them.

All present likewise kneel, and the rite is complete.

The vows are severe and must be kept perfectly, yet they are never forced upon ordinary believers. One may live freely, without contempt or condemnation.

Only those who feel the time has come, or who have resolved themselves, request the Consolamentum.

But for those within Montségur, to receive this rite at this moment—when surrender had been decided—was to accept death by fire.

I could not understand it.

If one lived, could one not continue to pass on the teaching by any means? Only the living can do so.

Death is annihilation—defeat. What can be transmitted from the grave?

I told her my thoughts.

"Thomas, I am grateful for your concern. But that is concern for my body. My essence is not this body.

The body is temporary. The true self is the soul hidden deep within.

Human souls have become so enslaved to matter that they have forgotten their origin in God.

In their natural state, people remain in ignorance. The power to perceive has been lost.

The purpose is not to transmit the teaching. The purpose is for me to awaken to the soul within myself."

(Do you mean… that by burning in fire, one awakens? That by being burned alive, one realizes one's true nature as divine…?)

I could not put these thoughts into words. My tongue faltered.

"And there are those already chosen to live and carry on the teaching.

They have left Montségur through another path. They know where the sacred texts and treasures of the Cathars are hidden.

Thomas—you are one of them. You are meant to live and carry our story into the future. That is why you are here."

"No… no, that is not so! I was held as a hostage in a monastery in Paris. By order of the King of France, I was sent here to learn about the Cathars and those who follow their teachings…"

"I know. There are those here who once served Count Raymond. One of them remembers taking you to Paris as a hostage.

He said he could never forget your face—that you must be Thomas, the hidden son of Count Raymond."

"……"

"It was not the King of France who sent you here.
You were drawn here by something within yourself.
And because of that, I wish to entrust this to you…
The Gospel of Mary."

She held out a manuscript.

"The words of Mary Magdalene, who carried the living voice of Jesus. It is our treasure.

When you leave this place, I want you to take it with you."

(It may be a treasure to you—but to me it is a burden. And I doubt I could protect it.)

"If the time comes, you may cast it away. Burn it if you must.

A gospel is, in the end, only a form. Preserving the form is not the purpose.

What matters is that something true remains within you—and flows onward through you.

Even the name 'Cathar' may vanish. Even the name 'Jesus' may disappear.

If only the truth itself remains… or at least the longing to know it…"

Who in this world would say such things—that even the name of Jesus need not remain—unless they were a heretic or possessed by the devil?

My mind recoiled—this is blasphemy—yet my heart accepted it.

Somewhere within me, a voice rose:

Yes… that is it. It must be so.

I asked within my heart:

(If that is so… then all the more reason why choosing death by fire is a mistake.)

"I wish to cast away fear," she answered.

"The fear of death. The attachment to the body. All the thoughts bound to the flesh—I wish to let them go."

Thus, I accepted the Gospel of Mary from Esclarmonde.

And yet… I doubt these notes will ever leave this place.

If they were discovered, I too would be burned at the stake.

When I leave this fortress, I cannot return to Paris.

I will have to live in hiding, somewhere, as a 'convert from the Cathars'… that seems to be my only path.

"Montségur… the last stronghold of the true Christians… and now it is about to fall.

I am not afraid of dying. This world itself was made by Satan—what regret could there be in leaving such a place of evil? The body belongs to Satan. What meaning is there in clinging to it? The soul alone is truth. The soul alone is everything. I cast away my body to save my soul.

But it hurts… the body cries out, crackling—burning. My eyes… I cannot close my eyes. Someone, please help me. My body is burning. Someone, please… let me die. Let me die quickly… quickly… quickly. Let my consciousness fade. Let me be freed from this agony of the flesh…

Flames… nothing but flames. Everything is red—red. Ah… I want to die. Please, let me die. Quickly… quickly… quickly…"

The suffering of those who died in the flames came through vividly.

What should I do? What should I do? What do you expect of me?

I cannot forget that sight. It is burned into the depths of my eyes.

No… I do not want to die like that. Whatever happens, I do not want such a death. Even if this world belongs to Satan, I cannot accept that. I cannot die that way.

"Ah—Thomas, please help me. I do not want to die like this… I do not want to die like this.

Through the flames, Thomas—I can see your face.

Thomas… are you smiling? Or are you crying?

Thomas, everything was wrong. Everything… was wrong. There is no salvation in the flames. To be saved by death—lies, all of it was lies. I believed that if I died, I would be freed from the body… that death would bring salvation…

But when will death come? When will peace embrace me?

I am suffering so much… yet death does not come. It does not come to take me. How long must I remain here?

Someone… someone kill me… Thomas, kill me."

I have heard these cries echo within my heart.

I am afraid… I do not want to die like this.

Their voices pursue me—begging to be killed.

When I saw their anguished faces beyond the flames, their voices rang within me—those who had burned to death.

All their voices… Esclarmonde's voice as well.

"This is not how it was supposed to be…"

Thomas finished reading the manuscript Eleonora had handed him and let out a deep sigh.

The face of Eleonora, seated before him, overlapped with the face of Esclarmonde—a woman he had never seen—and that face seemed to smile at him from beyond the flames.

(At last… I am freed from these flames.)

It seemed to Thomas that he heard such a voice.

"This is a copy I transcribed from a manuscript preserved within the Medici family," Eleonora said.

"The original was hidden, together with the Gospel of Mary, in a certain monastery in southern France. It was discovered by a Dominican inquisitor and placed in the Vatican Library."

Thomas was once again drawn back to reality by her voice.

"There are those among us… even within the Vatican. Even close to the Pope."

"Like Cardinal Alessandro?" Miguel asked.

"Yes. But I do not know who they are. One was a secretary to Pope Sixtus. He died from exhaustion while working on the revision of the Sixtus Bible.

And there is said to be another—someone who holds the secret of the Sixtus Bible. Even Cardinal Alessandro does not seem to know who it is.

Grand Duke Francesco and Lady Bianca, who knew everything, both passed away before revealing it.

Cardinal Bellarmine seems to have sensed something and is quietly investigating.

If this were to leak—even to the Protestants—it would be a devastating blow to the Vatican."

As she spoke, Eleonora took out a small piece of paper.

"I entrust this note to you.

It was given to me by Lady Bianca… with the words, 'If anything should happen to me.'"

## 24

Cardinal Bellarmino secretly visited Florence.

The carriage carrying him did not enter the city through the Porta San Giorgio. Instead, before reaching the gate, it turned left and headed straight for the Forte di Belvedere.

Designed in 1590 by Bernardo Buontalenti to defend Florence from political enemies, the fortress was now used as a private refuge for the Medici family.

"Has Armeni confessed anything?"

Bellarmino spoke the moment Grand Duke Ferdinando of Tuscany entered the room.

"As expected of a man Cardinal Alessandro saw fit to take

from the Swiss Guard," Ferdinando replied. "No matter how he was tortured, he did not say a word.

Still, for a man known as the conscience of the Catholic Church, that is a rather blunt and inelegant opening remark."

"To protect the Catholic Church, I have no leisure for elegance."

"Indeed. Florence too is now one body with the Vatican.

If Henry and Marguerite's divorce is to be granted, then by any means necessary my daughter Marie must be placed as the next Queen of France.

Only when the Vatican and this Duchy of Tuscany move as one can the Protestant forces in France be held down."

"And now," Bellarmino said, "the ghost of Sixtus—or rather, the ghost of the Cathars—has begun to raise its head again.

If the matter of the Sixtus Bible becomes known to the Protestants, the authority of the Vatican will be shaken at its foundation.

France, which has only just begun to settle, could then fall into chaos once more.

The Pope of Rome himself—the very foundation of Catholicism—branded a heretic…"

"A man who would even poison a pope to protect the Catholic Church…

Ah, forgive me. I spoke carelessly. A baseless rumor, of course.

And yet, I myself, Ferdinando, poisoned my own brother Francesco I and his consort.

In that sense, perhaps the Vatican and Tuscany are indeed one body."

At that moment, a knock sounded on the heavy wooden door.

When it opened, the smell of blood spread through the room.

"…Forgive me. Armeni is dead."

The torturer's leather apron, stained with blood, told of Armeni's gruesome end.

"Without saying anything?"

"Yes. Nothing except that he had been sent to Florence as Thomas's guard."

"What was your impression after questioning him?"

"I believe the man knew nothing. It did not feel as though he knew and was concealing it. One can tell from the face."

"I see. You have done well.

Throw the body into the Arno.

Do not attach weights. I want it found quickly.

Those monkeys from Japan will need a warning."

Ferdinando turned back toward Bellarmino.

"In that case, perhaps we must accuse Eleonora directly of heresy and question her."

"She will not speak.

Rather than waste more blood, watch Thomas and the others closely.

That is the shortest road."

By the time Thomas and his companions left the Monastery of Onofrio, it was nearly evening.

Even so, at this season the sun was slow to set, and the world still seemed bright as day.

Armeni, who should have been waiting, was nowhere to be seen.

Bartolomeo was the first to notice his absence.

It had been on his mind, but Armeni was the sort of man who might decide the right moment had come and return ahead of them. Bartolomeo had not truly worried.

But now, for some reason, he could not shake his unease.

"We can't wait here forever," Miguel said lightly. "I'm sure he went back to the monastery ahead of us."

But Bartolomeo was not satisfied.

Thomas put an end to the uncertainty.

"Whatever has happened, we should return to the monastery first. Everything comes after that.

We have learned that an important clue to the Sixtus Bible lies in the library of San Lorenzo, where we are staying.

For now, we must go back."

By now, Eleonora had told them everything she knew.

Roman Catholicism declared that Jesus alone was the Son of God.

But there had existed another view:

that this was not what Jesus taught.

Jesus taught that all people are children of God.

That one should not seek God outside oneself, but awaken to

the spiritual self by feeling the God who dwells within.

Jesus took on flesh in order to convey this truth.

That belief had been branded heresy and persecuted.

Therefore, abandoning outward forms, those teachings had appeared at different times as Manichaeism, as Gnosticism, as Catharism, within the spirit of the Renaissance, within the form of the Reformation—seeking always to dwell within all things.

During the Renaissance, the first Cosimo of the Medici founded the Platonic Academy.

Through the inquiries of the philosophers, alchemists, and scientists who belonged to that circle, it became clear that such a current did indeed exist, however vague and hidden.

To protect this movement that sought truth, Cosimo formed a secret society called Incunabula.

The name meant "the cradle of printing."

Its purpose was:

to preserve truth in print;

to collect and protect books published throughout the world in pursuit of truth;

and to support people and groups who sought truth.

On a personal level, through study, it also aimed to help one awaken to the true purpose of life.

This current spread widely.

Because it was not bound to any fixed form, people often

became involved in it without even realizing it.

Pope Sixtus V was the greatest example.

Nostradamus had stirred in him the ambition to become pope, and with the support of the Medici—the founders of Incunabula—he had ascended to the papal throne.

When he became Pope, near him stood Cardinal Alessandro Ottaviano de' Medici, whom he trusted most deeply.

Alessandro too was a member of Incunabula.

Not only that: even Sixtus's private secretary was a member.

However, very few understood the whole picture.

As for the Pope's secretary, he believed without doubt that the organization to which he belonged was a hidden fellowship of believers in the once-destroyed Cathar faith.

During the revision of the Bible, that secretary inserted certain passages and phrases into the text:

that Jesus was not the only Son of God,

but that all people are children of God,

and that God dwells within the hearts of all people.

Once such words are hidden in the sea of language, they are difficult to discover.

Under the murderous schedule called Sixtus's "whirlwind style," and especially when inserted after final proofreading, discovery was almost impossible.

After the work was complete, the secretary who had handled the proofreading died of exhaustion.

And so the Sixtus Bible entered the world under the authority of the papal declaration:

"By the fullness of apostolic authority, we decree and proclaim: this edition—approved by the authority granted to us by the Lord—must be accepted as true and legitimate, and must be relied upon without question in all public and private disputation, preaching, and interpretation."

But there was one man who noticed.

That man was Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino, Doctor of the Church.

If such a Bible circulated, the authority of the Vatican would collapse—especially amid the conflict between Protestants and Catholics after the Reformation.

In France, the conflicts with the Huguenots, symbolized by the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre, had only just begun to settle, and the authority of the Vatican had only just recovered.

What would happen if this Bible spread now?

Yet the Pope was absolute.

And the Bible too was absolute.

To protect the Catholic Church meant protecting the infallibility of the Pope and of Scripture.

As Bellarmino wrestled with this dilemma, a most convenient event occurred.

Pope Sixtus V died.

The moment the Bible was completed, Sixtus died.

It was far too convenient.

Without waiting for the new Pope's enthronement, Bellarmino issued orders to every Inquisition office in Europe:

"Recover and burn the Sixtus Bible."

Then, at a speed surpassing even Sixtus's whirlwind style, he completed a revised edition.

That was the Sixto-Clementine Bible, issued under the names of two Popes.

Bellarmino declared:

"The previous Sixtus Bible, containing many printing errors, is to be discarded. This Sixto-Clementine Bible shall be the foundation of the Church."

Thus, in the history of Roman Catholicism, the first—and perhaps the last—Latin Bible into which the teaching they had rejected as heresy had been inserted—

the teaching that all people are children of God—

was erased.

And yet, one copy of that Sixtus Bible still remained.

A small slip of paper entrusted to them by Eleonora.

On it, she said, was the key not only to the location of the Sixtus Bible, but also to the Gospel of Mary.

Soon, that truth would begin to reveal itself.

# 25

May 1968

"The numbers differ slightly depending on the source, but it is said that more than two hundred people chose to be burned alive."

Imuta Shūhei looked up from the book in his hands and murmured.

"This source says something like this," Sayaka added.

"Among those led to the execution ground were three especially tragic women: Corba, wife of the lord, who had just become a Perfect; her daughter Esclarmonde; and Corba's mother, Marchesia. They were the tragic representatives of three generations who had witnessed the end and destruction of an entire civilization…"

"There's something about this woman Esclarmonde," Sayaka said. "I feel as if I know her. Even though I've never met her… Look, I'm getting gooseflesh just talking about her."

Imuta's waiting room, set up in one corner of the television studio, had become something like a search headquarters for Yasuo.

Though in truth, the entire search party consisted only of Imuta and his wife Sayaka.

Sayaka said Yasuo was in Rome. More specifically, near Saint Peter's.

But then she began saying words like "southern France" and "Montségur," insisting that those places troubled her.

"Yasuo is in Rome, isn't he?"

"Yes, but I can't stop feeling concerned. Could you look into what the Cathars in that region were?"

Imuta had majored in art history at university and knew European history well enough. The moment he heard "the Cathars of southern France," he immediately thought of the Albigensian Crusade, carried out jointly by the Vatican and the French crown.

All he had to do was go to the company reference room and gather materials.

The commercial production company where he worked was one of the largest in the industry. It produced not only commercials but also PR films, and therefore had a rich collection of reference materials—more specialized than many ordinary libraries.

Now Imuta's room looked less like an art department waiting room and more like a research office for the history of European Christianity.

In the already cramped space, books and documents on the Inquisition, the Vatican, and other unlikely subjects lay scattered everywhere.

Imuta lifted his eyes from the materials and looked at the office whiteboard.

The Tenshō Embassy

Pope Sixtus V

Beatrice Cenci

The Inquisition

Nostradamus

Cardinal Bellarmino

The Medici Family

The words were written casually in water-based marker.

The previous year, when Yasuo had begun working on his university thesis, he started seeing visions and often suffered from sleep paralysis.

The words on the whiteboard were taken from things he had told Imuta and Sayaka then, as well as from things he had said half a year ago, when his visions returned after he was chosen for the Rome location shoot.

And now Sayaka had added the words that troubled her:

Montségur

Cathars

"Wait a minute," Imuta said. "The Albigensian Crusade was early thirteenth century. But the Tenshō Embassy, Nostradamus, and the Medici family are sixteenth century. What kind of causal connection could there be between those two periods? Are you going to explain this away as past lives too?"

"Past lives are not as simple as saying one person is reborn as another. The truth is, we don't really understand past lives. But if we think of them as something like a family tree in the physical world, I feel we'll fall into a terrible trap.

"It isn't a personality that reincarnates. It's more like the energy

of thought that cycles onward."

As she spoke, Sayaka went to the whiteboard and connected the words Cathars and Medici Family with a red marker.

"Hey—what is that? What does it mean?"

"I don't know."

"Wait… don't tell me the Medici family…"

Something suddenly flashed through Imuta's mind.

He hurriedly opened Christopher Hibbert's The Rise and Fall of the House of Medici.

"Here it is. The origins of the Medici aren't clear. Some say they were apothecaries or doctors. There's even a legend that one of them was a nobleman of Charlemagne who slew a dragon in Mugello. But the only thing that seems fairly certain is that in the mid-thirteenth century, they were probably charcoal burners in a place called Mugello. Then they came to Florence, rose in society, and suddenly made their fortune in finance."

Imuta kept talking almost to himself, while Sayaka closed her eyes and simply listened.

"The Cathars were destroyed by the Albigensian Crusade in 1243—that's the middle of the thirteenth century. But the so-called Cathar treasure vanished without a trace. Apparently, during a ceasefire, some of the Cathars escaped Montségur, taking treasure and sacred texts with them…"

He next began hurriedly flipping through a paperback titled The Heretical Cathars.

"Their destination was northern Italy! This book says some

Cathars fled into Italy. So if we connect that with the origins of the Medici—the Medici appearing suddenly from the northern outskirts of Florence and founding a financial empire—then if the Medici were Cathar survivors, their economic foundation becomes clear. The Cathar treasure!

"And then, in the sixteenth century, during the Medici revival, why did Cosimo support the Renaissance movement? At least in Florence, the Renaissance begins to look like a counterattack by the Cathars against Catholicism."

Imuta's eyes returned to the whiteboard.

"That's it! Not just the Medici—the Cenci family too. They must have been Cathar sympathizers. If we think that way, it becomes clear why the Vatican hurried the execution of the Cenci family, ignoring public opinion and petitions from foreign envoys.

"Yasuo seemed to react to Beatrice Cenci's portrait in this room too. This is it!"

Holding up the art book with Beatrice Cenci's portrait before Sayaka, Imuta kept speaking as if possessed.

The truth about the Cenci family that had flashed into Imuta's mind came down to this:

They had followed the teachings of the Cathars, branded heretical within Christianity.

The Cathar faith had spread mainly through southern France and northern Italy, but after the Albigensian Crusade in the thirteenth century, most of it had been wiped out. Through

relentless investigation and suppression, it was believed to have disappeared completely.

But that was only on the surface.

In reality, it had gone underground, merging with Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Jewish mysticism, and other streams, secretly preserving its teachings.

And that current had reached even into the Vatican.

The Cenci family, after all, served as Vatican treasurers. It also seemed that some cardinals supported this current.

And the one who held the secret was Beatrice's father.

When the Vatican realized this, it secretly disposed of Cenci, making it appear as patricide. Then, under the pretext of resolving the case, it eliminated the Cenci family and those within the Vatican connected to the Cathar current.

Was that not the truth?

If so, the Vatican's refusal to listen even to pleas for mercy from sympathetic Romans and foreign envoys made sense.

People had speculated that the Vatican was after the Cenci fortune, but given that the family was on the verge of bankruptcy, that explanation did not fit.

Having spoken that far, Imuta suddenly fell into thought.

"But why didn't the Vatican simply punish them as heretics? Why go through such a roundabout scheme?

"Which means… it wasn't only cardinals who were involved. Someone higher must have been connected. And above the cardinals…"

There was, of course, only the Pope.

"If the Pope himself had unknowingly taken on a heretical coloring…"

At that moment, one sentence from Sayaka stopped Imuta's self-questioning.

"Yasuo is coming back to Rome."

## 26

The corridor running straight through the center of the library reached the entrance and then divided into three descending streams.

The staircase, designed by Michelangelo, possessed the elegance of a river gently slipping over a gradual fall.

Thomas, Miguel, and Bartolomeo climbed those steps as though moving against the current.

Perhaps out of caution in the middle of the night, Thomas and Miguel quietly ascended the right-hand branch, which curved toward the entrance. Bartolomeo, however, proceeded boldly up the broad central stairs.

By day, through the small entrance cut into the massive wall, one could see the line of coffered ceilings bearing the Medici crest stretching straight into the depths of the library. The view created a symmetry at once intimidating and strangely pleasing.

But at this hour, the entrance doors were closed, and the only

light came from the candles the three carried.

Thomas caught his breath at the beauty of the door's ornamentation as it emerged in the candlelight.

What he had hardly noticed during the day now seemed to speak directly to him in the faint glow.

"Thomas, hurry and open it!" Miguel whispered urgently.

Thomas took out the key entrusted to him so that, during their stay, they could consult materials whenever necessary.

It was an extraordinary courtesy from the abbot.

"Facing left, sixth reading desk from the front."

Bartolomeo led the way, carefully illuminating each desk with his candle.

"Uno, due, tre, quattro, cinque, sei…"

The candlelight revealed the catalogue plate embedded at the end of the desk.

In an ordinary library, the stacks and reading room are separate. A reader borrows the desired book from the shelves and consults it in the reading room.

But in San Lorenzo, the books were set directly upon the reading desks.

On the aisle-side face of each desk was embedded a list showing which books were placed there.

In other words, the reader did not bring the book to himself; he brought himself to the book.

"HISTORIARVM… qui. Here."

Thomas peered at the portion of the list Bartolomeo indicated.

"HISTORIARVM ET ANNALIVM LIBRI…"

Tacitus, the foremost historian of ancient Rome, had written the Histories and the Annals. In 1574, the two had been published in Antwerp under the title Tacitus: The Surviving Histories and Annals.

The three found the book they were seeking on the reading desk.

"C. CORNELII TACITI… no mistake."

"Page 128. This page is the decoding key. Miguel, copy it."

Thomas turned the pages and gave the instruction.

"Good. Let me sit there."

When it came to copying, Miguel possessed a peculiar gift.

He did not merely copy without a single error. He reproduced even the typeface and the arrangement of letters line by line—the page layout itself.

Whether the original was handwritten or printed, his copies were so exact they seemed almost mechanical.

"It isn't the content that matters," Thomas said. "It's the arrangement of the letters."

"I know."

Even as he spoke, Miguel had already begun his meticulous work.

Thomas, watching him from the side, took a slip of paper from within his robe.

It was the note Eleonora had received from Grand Duchess

Bianca and kept all this time.

Pairs of numbers filled the page, separated by slashes and spaces.

Bartolomeo peered at it.

"In each pair divided by a slash, the first number gives the line position, and the second gives the column position. The spaces mark the breaks between words.

It is a simple substitution cipher, but unless one knows what document serves as the chiave—the key—it cannot be solved."

"Then the largest first number is twenty-eight. That means we need copy only up to the twenty-eighth line."

"How kind of you," Miguel replied. "But this book has twenty-eight lines per page. There is no twenty-ninth line."

At that moment, the library door opened.

"So you were here after all.

To sow the seeds of faith in the land of Japan… Such zeal born of youth and mission is enviable indeed. If only I were a little younger myself…

Still, please take care of your bodies. Without the body, there can be no work."

It was the elderly servant assigned to look after them.

"Thank you," Thomas said. "But what brings you here?"

"…Ah, yes. That is right. How terrible—age makes me forgetful.

No, this is no time for that.

Something dreadful has happened.

Your attendant, Armeni… is dead.

He was pulled from the Arno in a terrible state."

They were told that his body had been nailed to a cross and set adrift from upstream.

The Arno is narrowest near the Ponte Vecchio.

The cross had caught on one of the bridge piers, and against the current, its end struck the stone again and again—as if insisting upon its own existence.

Gong… gong… gong… gong…

The Ponte Vecchio was lined with goldsmiths' workshops known as sporti, some of them jutting outward from the bridge, supported by wooden frames.

Originally, butchers, tanners, and blacksmiths had kept their workshops there, using the river as a dumping ground. But the present Ferdinando I had expelled them because of the noise and stench, and rented the spaces to goldsmiths instead.

Those goldsmiths were now disturbed by the unexpected noise: some interrupted in their night work, others awakened from comfortable sleep.

The source of the sound was a human corpse nailed to a cross.

Both eyes had been crushed.

The knees were shattered.

All ten fingers had been smashed as well—likely by the torture of finger screws.

When the three arrived at the Ponte Vecchio, a city officer tore

open Armeni's shirt, darkened with blood.

Upon his bare chest, clearly carved with a blade, was the Star of David.

It was a sight horribly out of place in the clear morning air.

# Chapter 4
# Giordano Bruno

## 27

September 11, 1599

On this day, Thomas and his companions returned from Florence and entered Rome.

It was a clear Saturday, with a distinctly autumnal air, yet the sky was streaked with an unusually crimson dawn.

Five months had already passed since they had left Rome.

Using the cipher table Eleonora had taught them, Thomas and the others had learned that the Sixtus Bible was in Rome.

More than that—it was said to be in the chapel of the Cenci family.

When he heard the name Cenci, something within Thomas—Yasuo within him—reacted.

He remembered Beatrice Cenci, whom he had first learned about in the art room at Telesta in Osaka. He remembered meeting Beatrice herself during the Rome location shoot, and again as he wandered beneath Rome.

Now it seemed to him that even his presence here had been guided by Beatrice.

Thinking this, he had wanted to return to Rome as quickly

as possible. But when Cardinal Alessandro learned of Armeni's murder, he sought to keep the party away from both Florence and Rome for their own safety.

They were told to visit the libraries of Milan, Venice, and Siena for study and research.

Five months passed in restrained impatience.

And now, at last, they had returned to Rome.

They had left in spring. Now autumn was already beginning.

Thanks to that, they had avoided Rome's terrible summer heat. But when they returned, the city was wrapped in a strange atmosphere.

Men and women with severe expressions streamed along the road beside the Tiber toward Castel Sant'Angelo.

The flow of people grew and grew, until it became an enormous crowd moving toward the Tor di Nona prison.

They heard that on this day, the Cenci family was to be publicly executed.

Among the Cenci, the brothers Giacomo and Bernardo were imprisoned in Tor di Nona, across the Tiber from Castel Sant'Angelo. Before long, they would be brought out and taken to the Savella court, where Beatrice—considered the principal culprit—and her stepmother Lucrezia were being held.

There, the family would be joined together and led to the execution ground in the square before Castel Sant'Angelo.

Thomas could not believe it was coincidence that he had returned to Rome on the very day of Beatrice's execution.

And yet, knowing everything, he could do nothing.

Perhaps it would have been better not to know.

Better not to have learned of the Sixtus Bible, or of Incunabula.

How happy he might have been if he had known nothing and simply believed in a noble, pure, untainted Christianity.

Why did I come to Rome?

"They're coming! The execution procession has appeared!"

At that cry, the murmuring of the crowd ceased.

From within the silence rose a low, resonant prayer.

Heavenly Father, have mercy on us.

Son of God, Redeemer of the world, have mercy on us.

Holy Spirit, have mercy on us.

Holy Trinity, one God, have mercy on us.

Holy Mary, pray for us.

Holy Mother of God, pray for us.

Holy Virgin of virgins, pray for us.

Saint Michael, pray for us.

Saint Gabriel, pray for us…

The crowd opened a path.

At the head came members of the Confraternity of the Stigmata, wearing gray habits and carrying banners. Leather cords were tied tightly around their waists, from which hung wooden crucifixes, and they wore shoes over bare feet in the manner of the apostles.

Behind them came soldiers and gendarmes in scattered groups.

After them followed the hooded members of the Confraternity of Misericordia, also bearing banners.

Finally, two carriages appeared.

In the first were Giacomo, stripped to the waist, the executioner, the confessor, and officers of the court.

In the second sat Bernardo, his face hidden beneath a black cloak.

Behind them came another group of gendarmes and soldiers, trying to keep the swelling crowd away from the carriages.

The first carriage reached Thomas.

The sight within nearly made him cry out.

In accordance with the sentence, the court officers were tearing pieces of flesh from Giacomo's chest and back with red-hot pincers.

Giacomo, eldest son of the Cenci family, endured the torture without a single scream.

"He has certainly been given opium. Look at his eyes…"

Bartolomeo whispered into Thomas's ear.

But Thomas stared at the carriage in a daze, as though he had not heard.

His eyes met Giacomo's.

Those sorrowful eyes, seeming to plead for something, passed before him.

The confraternity members continued chanting the Litany of the Saints, repeating Ora pro eis each time they spoke a saint's name.

As if possessed, Thomas began following the carriage.

Miguel tried to follow him, but Bartolomeo caught his arm.

"If we are going to search the Cenci chapel, we cannot miss this chance. All Rome is looking toward Beatrice's execution. Right now, no one will interfere with us."

Both the Sixtus Bible and the Gospel of Mary were hidden in the chapel and sacristy of the Cenci family.

Indeed, now they could slip into the chapel without anyone noticing.

As Bartolomeo said, it was a once-in-a-lifetime chance.

"What about Thomas?"

"Thomas will be all right. Let him do as he wishes."

Without noticing that the two were not following, Thomas continued after the procession.

The procession crossed from Piazza Sant'Apollinare past Tor Sanguigna, through Piazza del Duca, and arrived at Via Santa Maria di Monserrato.

This was the district where the Savella court stood, and where Beatrice was imprisoned.

The procession halted in the courtyard before the court, waiting for Beatrice and Lucrezia to come down.

Before long, the two women appeared on the street, unchained and wrapped in dark cloaks.

Beatrice walked with dignity.

Behind her came her stepmother Lucrezia, dragging her feet.

Lucrezia's eyelids twitched nervously, and her breathing was

irregular. She seemed ready to panic at any moment.

Indeed, the moment she saw the brutality inflicted on Giacomo's body, she groaned and began weeping uncontrollably.

Beatrice, by contrast, remained dignified from beginning to end.

The Modenese spy Paolucci later reported to Cardinal d'Este that Beatrice, "though not yet eighteen, was known for surpassing beauty and noble bearing," and that "in this trial she showed such greatness of spirit that she appeared astonishing in the eyes of all."

In fact, Beatrice was twenty-two at the time. But her face, like that of a young boy, deepened the tragedy.

Now the crowd seemed ready to overflow.

Windows, balconies, and terraces were packed with people. Most showed solidarity with the Cenci family and openly expressed contempt and resentment toward those who had handed down such an unjust sentence.

With Beatrice and Lucrezia added to it, the procession resumed its movement through the murmuring crowd.

The two women walked beside the carriage.

When the procession entered the Banchi district, the incident occurred.

The paved road of the Banchi had become slick with dung.

At the time, it was common to throw excrement and filth into the streets. Europe from the Middle Ages into the early modern period was dirty and foul-smelling.

That was precisely why churches burned incense, staged light through stained glass, and filled their interiors with music,

creating another world.

Those who stepped into a church from the stinking, filthy outside world felt they had entered heaven on earth.

So the fact that the street in the Banchi was slick with filth was hardly surprising.

But on this day, the condition was apparently severe.

The road was nearly impassable. Those on foot had to press themselves against the walls to move forward.

In the midst of this, Lucrezia stepped on her own cloak.

She lost her balance at once, slipped on the filthy pavement, and fell.

That was the signal.

The crowd's excitement exploded all at once.

Some young men threw bouquets to the women.

Others hurled countless stones at the officials.

As if in a household quarrel, pots and plates were thrown at them as well.

A gendarme struck in the forehead by a stone flew into a rage, swinging the butt of his matchlock at anyone nearby.

Other gendarmes followed suit.

The area instantly became a battlefield.

People fled.

Some were crushed and trampled between those trying to escape and those attacking.

Gendarmes were sent into the riotous district and began suppressing the crowd.

Through that chaos, the procession rushed forward and reached the execution ground.

Thomas too—without knowing how he had escaped the turmoil—found himself at the Ponte Sant'Angelo, the place of execution.

Around noon, the bell of mercy—the Misericordia—began to toll from Castel Sant'Angelo.

As if urged on by the sound, Beatrice and the others emerged from the small chapel for the condemned.

After cutting through the chaos and reaching the execution ground, the four prisoners had been led there for their final Mass.

Thomas pushed his way through the crowd until he reached the front.

The first to be brought out was the youngest brother, Bernardo.

Inside the carriage, he had been forced to watch the torture inflicted on his brother Giacomo from beginning to end. Now he seemed almost senseless.

On his pale cheeks, the traces of tears clung in streaks.

Behind Thomas, people whispered.

"They say the younger one has only just turned eighteen."

"Will they kill him too?"

"No. They say he'll be sent to the slave galleys."

As they spoke, Bernardo was led to one corner of the hastily built scaffold and made to sit.

There, he would be forced to witness every detail of the

executions of his brother Giacomo, his sister Beatrice, and his stepmother Lucrezia.

After Bernardo, Lucrezia was brought out, supported by the confessors.

Was I married to Francesco Cenci only to meet such horror?

It was not a marriage I desired. True, I was a widow myself. At first I thought it a good match… but if I had known Francesco was a believer in heresy, I would never have married him.

Then I would never have been killed with the disgrace of being accused as an accomplice in my husband's murder…

No matter how deeply Lucrezia regretted it, everything was far too late.

At the top of the ladder to the scaffold, waiting to put an end to her regret, her hesitation—indeed, her entire life—stood the executioner, his face hidden behind a black mask.

The moment she saw him, Lucrezia suddenly slipped and nearly fell from the platform.

The confessor beside her hurriedly caught her and carried her, almost in his arms, to the narrow execution block.

The executioner's assistant seized her hair and lifted her head.

To Thomas, she seemed to have fainted.

Then, just as the officer raised his hand to give the signal, the executioner's axe came down upon her neck.

At that instant, her eyes—thought to be unconscious—opened wide.

Her head was severed from her body with an expression of startled questioning still upon it.

A terrible murmur of protest spread through the crowd gathered in the square.

That murmur rose even higher when Beatrice was brought out next.

"Beatrice is innocent! Don't let them kill her!"

The cry came from one of the men clinging to the eaves of the surrounding houses.

Provoked by that voice, jeers against the officials and denunciations of the Pope rose from every direction.

Amid that swelling noise, Beatrice, pale yet shining with proud beauty, walked toward the scaffold with unwavering steps.

At the foot of the platform, she paused for a moment and let her gaze drift toward the sky.

Then, as though resolved, she climbed the scaffold, smiled gently at Bernardo, whose eyes were wide with terror, and placed her neck upon the wooden block.

The murmuring stopped.

Men and women alike quietly crossed themselves.

From the silence, sobs began to spread here and there.

The executioner was clearly shaken.

All the anger and resentment of the crowd was directed at him.

The silence now was harder to bear than the jeers of a moment before.

Thomas watched Beatrice's pale face as she closed her eyes

calmly, as if accepting everything.

He thought she was beautiful.

At that moment, a child among the spectators suddenly burst into loud tears.

Startled and confused, the officer reacted to the cry—and without waiting for the proper signal, the executioner brought down the axe.

A roar rose again from the crowd.

For a moment it seemed another riot might break out.

The officers, shaken by the rising fury, hurriedly carried the final victim, Giacomo, up onto the scaffold.

He could no longer stand on his own, exhausted by the tortures already inflicted upon him.

Once on the scaffold, Giacomo saw Bernardo trembling there in terror.

Poor boy… still so young…

Giacomo tried to speak to his brother.

But his lips were swollen, and his tongue seemed stuck to his throat with fever. Only a rasping sound came out.

He weakly shook his head, then laid it upon the block and appealed with his eyes to the confessor.

The priest leaned close to his mouth, asking whether he wished to say something.

Giacomo forced out a faint, broken voice.

"Take… my brother… away…"

But the priest had no such authority.

He could only shake his head helplessly.

Giacomo closed his eyes in resignation.

Then the executioner's heavy mallet came down to crush his skull.

Pitifully, the eldest son of the Cenci family was denied even the dignity of an intact head.

And even his remains were to be cut apart by the executioner and hung as pieces of flesh from nails protruding from the scaffold.

At the sight of this, Bernardo finally lost consciousness.

A priest blessed the miserable remains.

The bell of mercy ceased.

An officer ordered a trumpet to sound, announcing the end of the execution.

Thus the ghastly ceremony came to an end.

As the Litany and penitential psalms began once more, magistrates, court officials, and members of the confraternities began leaving the square one after another.

But the crowd did not move.

The anger that had been stunned into silence by the brutality of the executions began to gather force again.

Insults were hurled at the officials and clergy as they tried to leave.

Hostility, accusation, threats—

all the grievances of daily life had condensed into Beatrice's execution, waiting only for a spark.

Soldiers and officials, now frightened, held halberds and matchlocks at the ready, trying to stretch ropes and clear a path

through the crowd.

One magistrate clung to what seemed to be the officer in charge of security.

"If this mob comes raging at us like this, the disaster that befell the Cenci family will fall upon us next…"

"Do not worry," the guard captain replied. "The people are nothing more than mongrel dogs. As long as they are fed, they only bark. They do not bite."

But his confidence collapsed in the next instant.

A man who had climbed a tree and was jeering at the officials came crashing down with the branch beneath him.

In his excitement he must have shaken it until it broke.

One of the startled soldiers fired his matchlock into the air.

The gunshot created a momentary silence.

But far from calming the crowd, it triggered total chaos.

Stones, dishes—anything that could be thrown—were hurled at officials and clergy.

Some men brandished broken branches and charged.

With one such man at their head, unarmed men surged forward, armed only with curses and their own bodies.

Women and children trying to flee were knocked down and trampled by the raging crowd.

The troops who had come to suppress the earlier disturbance had been stationed around the execution ground, but now they began to move.

With pikes and halberds leveled, they surrounded the mob and

slowly tightened the ring.

On the Ponte Sant'Angelo, the center of the chaos, some leapt into the Tiber to escape.

Others, driven mad by excitement, smashed their own heads against the bridge.

Still others seized soldiers' swords and ran wild.

One record says:

"Many lost their senses. One pitiful example was that of an eighteen-year-old girl named Maddalena degli Onofri, soon to become a nun. When she saw the heads of the Cenci women severed and Giacomo's brains scattered, she tore her clothes to pieces, clawed at her body, and fled. Once shut inside her house, she took a butcher's axe in her right hand, cut off her left hand, and died from loss of blood."

Thus, on that day, many were seized by madness, and many tragedies occurred.

The riot finally began to subside toward evening.

By then, thirteen people had died, more than six hundred had been injured, and over a hundred had been arrested.

Among those arrested was Thomas.

# 28

Thomas awoke in darkness.

He felt cold earth against his back.

A faint light entered from somewhere in the corner of the room.

Where am I?

When he tried to sit up, a sharp pain ran through the back of his head. He reached for it and found his hand sticky with warm blood.

"At last, you have come back."

A familiar voice sounded in the darkness.

For a while, Thomas did not understand where he was.

A familiar voice… but whose? Italian… no. Latin. He is saying, 'Welcome back.' This voice… Bruno. Giordano Bruno.

"Yes," the voice continued. "You have returned to the prison of Castel Sant'Angelo. Though this time, there is the difference between being inside and outside the cell… Well, you too are now a proper prisoner."

"……"

"Still, this too is part of Cardinal Alessandro's arrangement. You will be released before long. The story is that you had just returned to Rome from your studies in various parts of Italy, were caught up in the riot, and were arrested by mistake as one of the mob."

That's right. I came upon the execution of the Cenci family.

"What happened to Miguel and Bartolomeo?"

"Shortly after you were thrown into this cell, this letter was delivered through a guard under Cardinal Alessandro's influence."

Thomas held the letter Bruno handed him toward the faint light.

"……?"

"It is written in substitution cipher. The text has been changed into Latin, and then each alphabetic letter shifted by one. Unless one is used to such things, deciphering it in this dim light would be extremely difficult.

"In short, while you were present at the execution of the Cenci family, Miguel and Bartolomeo went to search the chapel of the Cenci family—the hiding place of the Sixtus Bible, which you learned of in Florence.

"They must have thought that while everyone's attention was fixed on the execution, they could search without suspicion."

"…And did they find it?"

"No. They did not.

"The sacristy was empty. Nothing remained. Everything had already been confiscated."

"I see…"

Rather than disappointment, for some reason a feeling of relief wrapped around Thomas.

"However, Thomas, one could say you have already found it.

"In the process of searching for the Sixtus Bible, you have learned many things about the Christian world—things you ordinarily could never have known.

"They may be called the darkness of Christianity.

"Yes. To search for the Sixtus Bible is to encounter the darkness of Christianity.

"And within that darkness, you have also learned that there is a current seeking truth, unbound by any one sect or religion.

"That current reaches from the distant past to the present, and onward into an endless future.

"Truth always slips through human hands. And people, being born and dying again and again, will continue to pursue it without end.

"Perhaps one day, people will find what is true within themselves.

"Until then, even if they know the path ahead is darkness, they must still walk it.

"I myself understand nothing.

"All I know is that Christianity as it now stands is mistaken. That alone."

"According to information Cardinal Alessandro sent me, my execution by fire has apparently been decided.

"There is no longer any need for excuses.

"I do not believe that everything I have claimed is correct, or that all of it is absolute truth.

"But I have no intention of recanting my thought.

"To testify that Christianity is wrong—that it is not the path to truth—I intend to die for my philosophy.

"Now that the fire has been decided, that is the only path left to me.

"Even if I know it is a path through darkness."

"……"

"Thomas, give Cardinal Alessandro my regards.

"Tell him that sending you here was the greatest farewell gift.

"And tell him to beware of Cardinal Bellarmino.

"He seems to know far more than we thought.

"Thomas, from now on, you yourself will be placed under his watch.

"You must live and return to Japan.

"And whatever happens there, you must survive.

"That is the fate of one who searches for the Sixtus Bible.

"I will likely never see Bartolomeo again. Nor Miguel. Nor you.

"If we meet again, it may be at my execution."

Before long, the footsteps of a guard approached.

The cell door opened.

"Thomas Araki! You are released."

Beyond the open door, morning light spread down the stone steps as if sliding.

Thomas bent low to pass through the doorway.

Then he turned back once more and looked at Bruno's face.

For no reason they could explain, the two simply nodded to one another.

Darkness returned.

In that darkness, Bruno thought of a man named Nostradamus.

Everything this time had begun with that man's words.

"A man who will one day become Pope of Rome…"

One could say the story began when those words were spoken to Felice, the young Franciscan friar.

Nostradamus's words bound Felice.

"One day, Your Holiness, the fame of this man Nostradamus shall reach your ears."

Just as he had said, the fame of Nostradamus as a prophet reached Felice again and again.

With each report, the prophecy directed at him grew heavier, binding him ever more tightly.

As if bound by that prophecy, Felice became Pope of Rome and took the name Sixtus V.

From the day he became Pope, a new anguish began for Sixtus.

Nostradamus was a man who, without the protection of Queen Catherine de' Medici of France, might have been burned by the Inquisition as a heretic.

"I did not become Pope because of the prophecy of such a heretic. I became Pope because God needed me. I am the one chosen by God."

This became the core of Sixtus's thought.

And in denying Nostradamus, he was perhaps influenced by him all the more.

Sixtus V, who was recognized by himself and others as the

protector of Catholicism, may have been more deeply influenced by Nostradamus and the Renaissance than anyone.

To display himself, both within and without, as the defender of Catholicism, Sixtus worked desperately.

And he set his sights on revising the Latin Bible, the very banner of Catholic faith.

That desire crossed the sea through the Tenshō boy envoys and reached Japan, where it bound the Christians there as well.

The unseen magic of Nostradamus's words had also conveyed the darkness of the Christian world to a young Japanese man named Thomas.

"Nostradamus," Bruno murmured inwardly, "you have placed a terrible burden upon that young man from Japan.

"Do you mean to say you knew the life Thomas would lead from here on?

"That everything had been foretold in the world of the stars?"

# 29

Chiyo was still reciting from Santos no Gosagyō.

"...Thus the warriors searched in every direction, but when they could not find him, they seized two children, tortured them, and learned where he was staying. Then they burst into the lodging where the saint was hiding. Though the saint could easily have escaped if he wished, he understood that the time appointed by Deus had come. He went out to meet them, invited them inside, served them a fine meal, and meanwhile offered his oratio to Deus. Seeing this, even those fierce warriors felt pity, wondering how they could bind such a good man…"

Santos no Gosagyō had been printed in Kazusa in 1591 as a romanized Japanese book, using the printing press brought from Europe.

The work of publication had been carried on by the members of the Tenshō Embassy who had brought back the press, together with teachers at the collegio and seminario.

Among the students who helped with that work were Thomas and Chiyo's elder brother Miguel.

As a child, Chiyo had often gone to the collegio to play, and Thomas had taught her the Roman alphabet using freshly printed sheets as her lessons.

Her recitation had now reached the Life of Polycarp.

Listening to her, Thomas—no, Ryōhaku—quietly murmured the next passage.

"...At the end of that oratio, he entrusted to Deus all the Christians who came to his mind. When his prayers were finished, the warriors placed the saint upon a donkey and led him before the examiner…"

Chiyo stopped reciting.

Without even wiping her tears, she looked directly at Thomas.

Facing that questioning gaze, Thomas continued.

I myself was brought before examiners several times.

The first was not before Japanese officials.

It was in Rome.

And the man before whom I was brought was none other than Cardinal Bellarmino, called the conscience of Christianity.

It was after I had returned from Florence, and the riot following the execution of Beatrice Cenci had begun to settle.

Cardinal Bellarmino said to me:

"Did you find the Sixtus Bible?"

I did not know how to answer, and remained silent.

He then said:

"I know you went to search the Cenci chapel."

And further:

"…You found nothing, did you?"

"The Sixtus Bible was deeply influenced by heretics.

That is why, after the Pope's death, every copy had to be destroyed.

Indeed, thanks to the efforts of the excellent and diligent Inquisition offices spread throughout Europe, all copies of the Sixtus Bible were recovered and burned.

Not even a single volume should have been able to escape the network the Vatican had created.

And yet, Thomas—you people from the farthest edge of the East knew of the Sixtus Bible.

Not only that, you said you wished to use it as the source text for a Japanese New Testament.

From that moment, everything went wrong.

Despite my warnings, you began sniffing around the Sixtus Bible.

Well, because of that, the existence of a heretical organization began to surface.

Its influence has likely reached even into the Vatican."

Bellarmino had been speaking quietly, his head slightly lowered.

Then he gently raised his face, and his sharp eyes turned toward Thomas.

"That is why such alterations could be made to the Sixtus Bible.

Thomas, do you know who I mean?"

"…The secretary of Pope Sixtus?"

"Not only him.

You saw the execution with your own eyes, did you not?

The Cenci family were unquestionably members of this organization.

If only I could have made them confess—but one cannot pursue certain matters beyond a certain point.

We can see fragments, but no one knows the whole.

Even Beatrice Cenci, that daughter of the house, believed only that she had been arrested for the false crime of murdering her father."

"Then Beatrice truly was innocent, as the people of Rome say?"

"They understand nothing.

Knowing nothing, they cry, 'Beatrice is innocent. The Vatican should listen to her claims.'"

"…Was she not innocent?"

"She was.

I was the one who had Francesco Cenci killed."

"The Cenci family had served for generations as treasurers to the Vatican, but they also appear to have believed in a heresy descended from the Cathars.

As for the Sixtus Bible, I believed from the beginning that it was not the work of the Pope alone.

True, the Pope was stubborn. And in reacting against the humanists of the Renaissance, one could say he was influenced by them all the more.

But he was not the sort of man to insert such phrases into the Bible.

So I began investigating those who had surrounded Pope Sixtus at the time.

Then Francesco Cenci, frightened of something, fled Rome

with his entire family.

Finding that suspicious, I ordered the Inquisition to search the abandoned Cenci palace thoroughly.

As a result, in the Cenci chapel we discovered a copied manuscript of the Gospel of Mary.

It was said to be a record of the words of Jesus written by Mary Magdalene, who had supposedly been close to him, and it had been treasured by Cathar believers.

Of course, it was false—without question a heretical text.

And as we continued investigating, we learned that this was not limited to Francesco alone.

Heretics extended to people surrounding the Pope, including the secretary of Pope Sixtus, and even to cardinals."

"But aside from them, we could not identify specific individuals, nor did we have proof.

If we made a public uproar, we would damage the authority of the Vatican. And there was no guarantee that the matter would not lead back to the Sixtus Bible.

Therefore, I bribed the castellan of the fortress where Francesco Cenci had fled and had him investigate those around them.

But Francesco discovered this.

In the struggle that followed, we had no choice but to kill him."

"Then to judge the remaining Cenci family for parricide…"

"The entire family appears to have believed in heresy.

But that could not be made public.

So we fabricated a sensational incident and directed everyone's attention there.

The more dramatic and tragic something is, the easier people believe it.

Meanwhile, we thoroughly investigated how deeply heresy had penetrated the Vatican through that family.

Then they died for the crime of killing their father."

"How cruel…"

"At this moment, the Vatican is fighting humanists and Protestants.

If the authority of the Vatican falls to the ground, this world will come under the rule of an immense darkness.

A far more terrible world will arrive."

Bellarmino thought:

If the Pope had not hated me so deeply, the matter of the Sixtus Bible could have been stopped beforehand.

But he loathed me almost pathologically.

Because I had often voiced objections to his ideas, the Pope had erupted in anger at me again and again. While Sixtus held the papal office, I even had to take refuge by leaving Italy under the pretext of duty.

But now that matters have come this far, nothing can be done.

The roots of heresy nesting within the Vatican must be

uprooted.

"Then we were used for that purpose…"

"Exactly.

I intended to use you, who were sniffing around the Sixtus Bible, as bait.

This was an opportunity to tear out the roots of heresy that had entered the Vatican itself.

Thomas, for that purpose, you and your companions will have to bear a burden.

But that too is the path you chose.

Only, I have not yet managed to grasp Cardinal Alessandro's tail.

That too, I suppose, is only a matter of time.

…Well then, what do you think?

This is everything you wished to know.

Did you gain anything from it?

Having taken into your breast so much of Christianity's darkness, can you still believe in Christianity?

You Japanese seem to be a race that loves nothing so much as taking unnecessary suffering upon yourselves.

…Do not worry.

Now that I know the Sixtus Bible is gone, I have no intention of punishing you.

On the contrary, I will see to it that you are ordained as diocesan priests, as you desire.

It will only cause you greater suffering.

But that too is the path you have chosen…"

Chiyo's husband, Kyūsuke, who had been listening to Thomas's story, could no longer remain silent.

"Lord Thomas, if the Sixtus Bible was not found, then what is the Bible there before us? I thought you said…"

"It was not in the Cenci chapel.

But the Sixtus Bible was hidden in an unexpected place.

It had been sitting openly in the library of the Collegio Romano, where we lived."

The Collegio Romano was the place where Thomas and the others lived as boarders.

Before departing for Florence, Thomas had once been taken to its library by Father Bellarmino and entrusted with a Bible.

"The Bible of Sixtus contained too many printing errors and was discontinued. Under the next Pope, Clement, a revised edition was issued as the Sixto-Clementine Bible. This is the copy I have prepared here. If you are to translate the life of Jesus into Japanese, you would do well to use this edition as your text."

That Bible, handed to him with those words, had somehow continued to trouble Thomas.

Bellarmino's words echoed within his heart, becoming a great unease that pressed heavily upon him.

Trying instinctively to shake off that voice, he awoke.

He was in the boarding room he shared at the Collegio Romano.

As though waiting for him to open his eyes, a young woman stood at the door, gazing at him.

Cenci… Beatrice Cenci.

There was no fear in him.

Thomas called her name within his heart.

Beatrice gave a slight nod, then vanished beyond the door, as though urging him to follow.

Led by her, Thomas arrived at the library of the Collegio Romano.

The Sixto-Clementine Bible lay upon the reading desk, exactly where it had been placed when Bellarmino recommended it.

Thomas looked at Beatrice, as though asking a question.

Her eyes seemed to nod deeply in reply.

"In truth, the Sixtus Bible had merely had its cover replaced.

It had been carried out by Beatrice and exchanged with a spare Bible kept in the sacristy of Castel Sant'Angelo, where she had been imprisoned.

Somehow, through circumstances unknown, it was later moved to the library of the Collegio Romano.

And unbelievably, it was placed into our hands by none other than Cardinal Bellarmino himself—the very man who had tried to erase the Sixtus Bible from the world.

Once the cover had been changed, no one could tell what it was.

Had I not been guided by Beatrice's ghost, I would never have found it so easily.

But once I had found it, all that remained was to ask permission to take it back to Japan as a text for translation."

Chiyo and Kyūsuke's eyes were fixed upon the Sixtus Bible before them.

Without minding their reaction, Thomas continued.

"Let me return to the story.

As I was about to leave Father Bellarmino, he said one final thing to me."

"Bruno's execution has been set for February of next year.

He will be burned at the stake in the Campo de' Fiori.

And when the time comes, Thomas, I intend to have you present."

"I had known it might come to that.

And yet some part of me had still hoped that, through Cardinal Alessandro's efforts, Lord Bruno might be saved.

But that hope too was cut off.

The decision to execute Bruno meant, at the same time, that the forces within Catholicism seeking reform—represented by Cardinal Alessandro—had been defeated by the conservative forces represented by Father Bellarmino.

With Bruno's execution, it was clear that a storm of reaction would sweep through the Church.

And yet Alessandro's counterattack was fierce.

When His Holiness Clement VIII passed away in March 1605, Alessandro, backed by the power of the Medici family and of

France, was elected as Pope Leo XI, the 233rd Pope of Rome.

Because he was related by marriage to Marie de' Medici, Queen of France, the Duchy of Tuscany and France were swept up in rejoicing when his election was decided.

Perhaps the Grand Duke of Tuscany also thought that a Pope from the Medici family would be easier to deal with than the rigid Bellarmino.

Not only Florence and France, but also the people of Rome loved his generous nature, and the whole city seemed to overflow with joy.

We too rejoiced.

Now everything would change, we thought.

But during that joyful procession, the incident occurred.

The bellyband of the horse he was riding broke, and the Pope was thrown.

After that, he took to his bed.

Far from recovering, he caught a chill, and at last he died.

His reign lasted less than four weeks—from April 1 to April 27, 1605.

Even now, I believe Pope Leo's death was plotted.

If the breaking of the horse's girth was planned, then the worsening of his illness afterward must also have been due to poison.

That is what I believe.

Thus our dream too vanished.

After Leo XI, Paul V—one might call him the very representative of the conservative faction—ascended the papal throne."

"How did Lord Bruno meet his end?"

Chiyo interrupted without thinking.

Without her noticing, a little of her usual warmth had returned to the stern expression on her face.

## 30

The execution of Giordano Bruno was set for February 17, 1600.

On that day, Bruno was led out of his prison. After crossing the Ponte Sant'Angelo, he was taken along a narrow street known as Via di Coda—"Rope-End Street"—aptly named, as he was dragged forward with the trailing end of the rope that bound him.

At last, he was brought to the Campo de' Fiori.

Today, the Campo de' Fiori—"Field of Flowers"—is lively with stalls selling flowers, fruits, and vegetables. But in those days, it was feared as a grim place of execution, where countless people branded as heretics were burned alive.

Bruno had been born in 1548 in the town of Nola, near Naples.

He himself always referred to himself as "a man of Nola," and ever since he left for Naples at the age of fourteen, that town remained fixed in his heart as the place to which he would one day return.

He studied the humanities and dialectics from a young age, and at seventeen entered a Dominican monastery. Yet even during

his monastic life, Bruno showed far greater interest in memory techniques, geometry, and astronomy than in theology. He immersed himself in the natural philosophy of Telesio and secretly read the works of Erasmus, which had already been banned.

Such wide-ranging inquiry soon fostered in him a critical attitude toward Christian doctrine, and he gradually came under suspicion by the monastery authorities.

Finally, in 1576, at the age of twenty-eight, he was denounced in Rome on suspicion of supporting Arianism—the denial of Christ's divinity.

Thus began his sixteen years of wandering.

From Paris to London, he continued writing and lecturing, gaining increasing fame. But when he eventually returned to Italy, he was arrested in Venice as a heretic.

While imprisoned in Venice, Bruno still hoped to leave the monastic life and live as a philosopher, believing that the Papal Court might recognize the value of his ideas. This hope was not without foundation, for behind him stood the understanding and support of Cardinal Alessandro of the Medici family.

Thanks to these efforts, Bruno was transferred to Rome after a year.

But his hopes were short-lived.

Amid the rising tide of the Counter-Reformation, voices condemning Bruno—led by Cardinal Bellarmino—grew ever stronger. His release became impossible, and after seven years of interrogation and torture, even his faint hopes withered away.

It was during this period that Bruno met the young Japanese

man, Thomas.

Through Thomas, Bruno conveyed the darker aspects of Christianity, and at the same time solidified his own resolve. Abandoning all illusions, he chose to remain steadfast in his philosophical convictions.

The final charges of heresy brought against Bruno included eight points:

doubting the doctrine of the Trinity, denying the sacrament of the Eucharist, questioning the divinity of Christ, teaching the transmigration of souls, and asserting the infinity of the universe.

The inquisitors tore his arguments from their philosophical context and condemned them as heresy. But Bruno stood firm:

"That is a distortion. It is a refusal to recognize philosophy itself. In matters of faith, I hold no heresy."

Thus, he openly opposed the authority of the Papal Court.

At the center of the square, a great circular pile of firewood had been stacked, ready to be lit.

In its midst stood a tall stake, rising against the backdrop of the ancient Theatre of Pompey.

To the cleric reading out his sentence, Bruno declared:

"Perhaps you who pronounce this sentence fear it more than I who receive it."

To prevent him from uttering such words again, his tongue was gagged. Stripped naked, he was bound to the stake.

Then, before him, a long pole bearing a crucifix was raised.

Bruno looked at the young monk holding it—and was startled.

Beneath the deep hood, he saw a familiar face, wet with tears:

Thomas.

Thomas stood motionless, as if waiting for an answer.

Within Thomas's heart, Bruno's voice rang clearly:

(Thomas… as long as you bind yourself to Christianity, you will never find what is true.)

Sensing that his message had reached him, Bruno gave a slight shake of his head and turned his face away from the cross.

(The cross… will resolve nothing…)

An official roughly pushed the stunned Thomas aside.

At that moment, the piled wood was set alight.

Flames leapt up at once, licking the wood like the tongues of serpents, then swelling into a blazing inferno that engulfed the stake and wrapped itself around Bruno's body.

Thick, swirling smoke rose upward, climbing into the sky above the square.

It was February 17, 1600.

Many later thinkers would come to see this execution as the moment when the Renaissance came to an end.

# 31

At the gate of Saishō-ji Temple, two figures—a man and a woman—were about to depart.

The man, Kyūsuke, bowed repeatedly toward the temple grounds.

The woman, Chiyo, stood there in a daze.

As if to protect her, Kyūsuke gently placed an arm around her shoulders and led her away.

Inside the gate, an official from the magistrate's office remained behind.

He tucked the certificate of apostasy from Christianity—just handed to him—into his robe, then left the temple and headed toward the western office.

Looking back, a thin thread of smoke rose from somewhere in the temple grounds, as though a fire had been lit, and was being drawn up into the blue sky.

In the courtyard of Saishō-ji, Thomas—now known as Araki Ryōhaku—stood before a fire, throwing something into the flames.

He was burning the Sixtus Bible.

Tearing out its pages one by one, he fed them into the fire.

Within those flames, Ryōhaku heard Bruno's voice:

"As long as you are bound by Christianity, you will never find what is true…"

Not only Christianity—even Buddhism, even any religion as a form.

As long as one is bound by form, one cannot reach what is real.

That truth had been driven into him mercilessly.

And yet…

Could he deny that he himself was still running from death, clinging to that very realization as an excuse?

Not only Bruno—countless others in Japan had also given their lives in those flames.

Now he had forced Chiyo and Kyūsuke to renounce Christianity.

But had he truly done the right thing?

As Bellarmino had said—

Had he known nothing, might he too have died alongside the many Christians at Nishizaka?

"What I found in searching for the Sixtus Bible… was nothing but hell."

"Must I carry this hell with me and go on living…?"

Ryōhaku's heart found no peace.

# 32

At that same time, Producer Fuji—accompanied by a young interpreter—was arguing with a staff member in the office of Castel Sant'Angelo.

Fuji had received word from Imuta and Sayaka in Osaka:

"Yasuo should be found in Castel Sant'Angelo."

Rushing there in haste, he had searched for half a day—but found nothing.

With closing time approaching, he finally burst into the office.

But communication broke down.

"There is no such Japanese person here."

"If he went missing at Saint Peter's, why would he be here?"

"You should go to the police instead."

The conversation went nowhere.

Meanwhile, closing time drew near.

In winter, Castel Sant'Angelo closed at 4 p.m., but from April it stayed open until 7 p.m.

That day, ticket sales had ended at six.

The last visitors were a group of Boy Scouts from Germany.

Unlike adult tourists, the boys showed little interest in illuminated artworks.

They were drawn instead to cannons along the walls, to siege

engines in the courtyard—

But more than anything, they were captivated by the labyrinthine underground prison.

Three boys, armed with penlights, ventured boldly into the darkness.

They discovered a heavy door along a descending corridor.

On the wall above it was a small barred opening, no more than twenty centimeters across.

"Is this it?"

"It has to be… this must be it!"

They had heard stories—

That human bones and hair had once been found in the underground cells.

Unable to resist the lure of fear, they shone their lights through the gap beneath the door.

But it was too thick. They could see nothing.

One boy shoved his hand through the gap.

"The floor… feels like dry earth…"

At that moment, another boy suddenly remembered a story:

The ghost of a beautiful young woman said to appear at Castel Sant'Angelo.

Her name—Beatrice.

She had been imprisoned here for the murder of her father, and after harsh interrogation, executed along with her brothers in

the square.

She was only twenty-two.

Her beauty and dignity had moved the people of Rome to tears.

Even now, it was said her spirit appeared near the bridge.

"Ahhh!"

A boy screamed.

Startled, the boy with his hand in the gap panicked—his hand stuck fast.

"Ahhh!"

He yanked it free, turned angrily—

And saw his friend pointing into the darkness behind them.

The corridor sloped downward and curved sharply to the right.

There, at the bend—

A man lay collapsed, his back against the wall.

Unconscious.

Hearing the boys' cries, a guard rushed in.

And so, at last, Yasuo's disappearance came to an end.

More than thirty hours had passed since he vanished at St. Peter's Basilica.

But the boy who had screamed insisted:

He had not seen the man first.

He had seen a young woman.

A ghost.

And Yasuo himself would later say—
He had been guided there
by a young woman.

Thus, the legend of the ghost of Castel Sant'Angelo gained a new chapter.

Epilogue

Ryōhaku—Thomas—hung upside down in the foul-smelling pit.

At some point, he noticed that the splitting pain in his head had begun to fade.

Where was he now?

Yes… after making Kyūsuke and Chiyo apostatize, he himself had once again declared that he was a Christian.

Not because he had returned to belief in Christianity.

Rather, he no longer wished to be bound by any religion, any morality.

And yet, when he thought of those who had believed his words and gone to martyrdom, the pain became unbearable.

Because he had taught wrongly, many people had chosen a hell without salvation.

They had died clinging to an empty illusion—that beyond suffering lay Paraiso.

But there had been nothing there but curses.

Nothing but resentment.

If that was so, then he too would descend into that suffering.

It seemed the only atonement left to him.

Now Ryōhaku watched himself.

Bound round and round, suspended upside down over a pit filled with filth, his temples cut by a blade so the blood would not congest and kill him too soon.

He watched that self from outside himself.

The splitting pain in his head was gone.

More than that, the crushing anguish in his heart was gone.

And in that heart, one thought arose.

"Thomas, God is not outside you.

God is not in heaven.

God is within your heart.

The true self is within you.

But you have hidden it.

The heart that believes the body to be the self has hidden the true self, making it impossible to see."

Was that his mother?

Something warm—so warm—wrapped around all of him.

Before he knew it, all forms disappeared.

Words disappeared.

Only warmth remained.

Outside the pit, officials were shouting:

"Fall! Fall! Just shake the rope!"

They beat pots and yelled into the hole, the noise echoing inside.

An hour and a half had already passed.

Perhaps exhausted, the officials paused to rest, and silence returned.

Then one of them shouted:

"The rope is shaking!"

"He has fallen! Ryōhaku has fallen! Pull him up! Quickly—pull him up! At his age, he'll die if we don't hurry!"

After that, Ryōhaku was moved to the prison house without regaining consciousness.

At his bedside sat Miguel—now calling himself Ryōjun—who had journeyed with him in Rome and later apostatized with him after returning to Japan.

When Ryōhaku briefly regained consciousness, Ryōjun happened to have been summoned to the magistrate's office.

An official rushed in.

"Ryōhaku has regained consciousness. He is trying urgently to say something."

"What is he saying?" the magistrate asked.

"Well…"

"What is he saying?"

"He keeps saying, 'God was within the heart. God was within the heart. I must tell Miguel this…' That is all he says."

"…He has gone mad. No further examination is needed. Leave

him as he is."

Then the magistrate turned to Ryōjun and said:

"Go to him quickly."

By the time Ryōjun arrived, Ryōhaku had already breathed his last.

It was 1646, the third year of Shōhō.

He is said to have lived sixty-seven years.

## March 1969

Producer Fuji came to Imuta, who was painting the cyclorama in the television studio.

"Hey. This is from Yasuo."

Fuji handed him an airmail envelope.

Imuta wiped his paint-stained hands on the towel at his waist and took it.

The postmark was from Rome.

"That idiot…"

As Imuta pulled out the thickly folded letter, a photograph slipped out.

Fuji picked it up and handed it to Imuta with a pleased expression.

Yasuo was smiling on the Ponte Sant'Angelo.

"What a guy. After making everyone worry… and there he is, enjoying himself."

Since then, without consulting Fuji, Imuta, or even Sayaka, who had helped me so much, I quit the production company.

I am truly sorry.

And I still have not been able to respond to Sayaka's suggestion that I meet Mr. Furuno at least once.

I understand very well what Sayaka says:

that I should not cling to past lives, but look directly at the suffering of my present self.

By doing so, the many sufferings from the past that I carry with me may also be healed.

I understand that.

But I wanted to think a little more for myself—

about Thomas,

about the ghost of Beatrice who led me to him,

and about Bruno.

I know that investigation itself may have no meaning.

But for me right now, to investigate feels like speaking with them.

Before coming to Rome, I found a certificate of apostasy at the Nagasaki Prefectural Library.

The original is apparently kept at Saishō-ji Temple, and what I found was a copy.

After the date "Shōhō 2, Year of the Rooster," the names "right: confectioner Kyūsuke and wife" were listed.

At the end, the guarantors were written as:

Chūan, apostate Nanban priest

Ryōjun, apostate Japanese priest

Ryōhaku, apostate Japanese priest

Can you imagine how shocked I was?

None of it was delusion or hallucination.

Fuji will probably scold me and say, "Are you still talking about that?"

But I'm enclosing a copy.

I also found a passage about Thomas's final days in the Diary of the Head of the Dutch Trading Post, preserved at the Nagasaki Prefectural Library. I copied it out below.

### From the Diary of Willem Verstegen

November 1646

17th. Around noon, an interpreter came and asked where our imported goods were obtained. I replied that most came from China and Holland. He was apparently investigating whether there would be any difficulty if Chinese ships ceased arriving.

Since coming to Japan, I have tried to learn about the apostate padres.

A Japanese man named Toma had lived in Rome for many years and had even served as an attendant to the Pope. Previously, several times, he had confessed of his own accord that he was a Christian. But the magistrate believed that, due to his old age, he had become mentally deranged, and left him alone.

Later, after being hung by his feet for a full day and night, he

abandoned the faith outwardly, but died without losing faith in his heart.

Only two now survive.

One is Chūan, a Portuguese who was formerly head of the Jesuits here, but his heart is black.

The other is a brother of the former town elder Gotō Shōzaburō, and he does not act against the interests of the Dutch in the least.

Lastly, I found another interesting source concerning the Sixtus Bible.

A copy of the Sixtus Bible had also found its way into the Bodleian Library at Oxford, where it was discovered by the first librarian, Dr. Thomas James.

In 1611, Dr. James published a book comparing the Sixtine Bible and the Sixto-Clementine Bible.

He discovered that the differences between the two popes could not be denied—

not only in chapter and verse numbers, but in the body of the text itself, and even in the preface and the great papal bull.

Moreover, Dr. James wrote that what was especially noteworthy was that the two popes were clearly in conflict over their differing views.

"Here are two opposing popes.

Sixtus stands against Clement, and Clement against Sixtus.

They dispute, write, and contend over the Bible of Jerome."

That is all.

I will contact you again when I return from Rome.

By the way, the girl who took the enclosed photograph—just someone passing by, with no connection to anything, but still—

her name was Beatrice.

Quite a surprise, isn't it?

Thank you, truly.

## ■ Main Characters from the Japanese Side ■

### Thomas Araki / Ryōhaku Araki

Born in Settsu in 1574 as the eldest son of Araki Tadamichi and Tokiko. After losing his parents during the rebellion of Araki Murashige, he is entrusted by his father's friend Takayama Ukon to the Seminario in Azuchi as one of its first students. At seventeen, he leaves Japan with Miguel Gotō to study in Rome, arriving in Lisbon at the age of nineteen. His purpose is not only to be ordained as a priest, but also to bring Christian books back to Japan—especially the "Sixtus Bible," which is to serve as the basis for a Japanese translation of the New Testament and its publication. However, the supposedly completed "Sixtus Bible" cannot be found anywhere, and in pursuing its mystery, Thomas becomes deeply entangled in the dark undercurrents of the Christian world. Returning to Japan in 1615, he abandons Christianity and spends the rest of his sixty-seven-year life serving as an investigator of hidden Christians.

### Miguel Gotō / Ryōjun Gotō

Dates unknown. The son of Gotō Sōin, a wealthy Nagasaki merchant who became a publisher of Western-style printing. He is also the younger brother of Gotō Shōzaburō, later one of the town elders of inner Nagasaki. Historically, during the Great Expulsion of Christians in 1614, he was exiled to Manila, ordained there as a priest in 1618, later returned secretly to Japan for missionary work, was captured, and eventually apostatized. In this story, however, he travels to Rome together with Thomas and joins him in uncovering the mystery of the "Sixtus Bible."

### Araki Tadamichi and Tokiko

The parents of Thomas Araki. In this story, Tadamichi is portrayed as the son born to a peasant woman by Araki Kyūzaemon, chief retainer of

Araki Murashige. Deeply admiring Takayama Ukon as both mentor and friend, the couple convert to Christianity under his influence. When their lord Araki Murashige rebels against Oda Nobunaga, they entrust their son Thomas to Ukon and themselves perish together during the siege.

### Araki Kyūzaemon / formerly Ikeda Kyūzaemon

Father of Araki Tadamichi and chief retainer of Araki Murashige. Originally a member of the Ikeda clan and leader of the "Twenty-One Ikeda Retainers" serving Ikeda Katsumasa, he later entered Murashige's service after internal conflicts within the Ikeda family. During Murashige's rebellion, he defended Arioka Castle and, after Murashige fled to Amagasaki, conspired with him to deceive the Oda forces by pretending to urge surrender while secretly helping the Araki clan's main forces escape.

### Nakaura Julião (c.1568–1633)

Vice-envoy of the Tenshō Embassy to Europe. "Julião" is his baptismal name. Born as the son of the lord of Nakaura Village in the Ōmura domain of Hizen Province. During his stay in Rome, Pope Gregory XIII showed special concern for the sickly Julião and even granted him a private audience. In this novel, Julião forces himself to attend Gregory XIII's funeral despite his illness. Though fictional, this episode highlights what the Pope truly meant to the people of Rome at the time:
"The people of Rome don't really believe in the Pope…"

### Takayama Ukon (1552–1615)

One of the most famous Christian daimyō of the Azuchi–Momoyama and early Edo periods. In 1578, his lord Araki Murashige rebelled against Nobunaga. In order to protect Christians, Ukon sided with Nobunaga, but suffered deeply when ordered to execute surviving

members of the Araki household. He shelters Thomas, the only son of his close friend Araki Tadamichi, and later entrusts him to Organtino when the Seminario is established in Azuchi. During the anti-Christian persecutions under Hideyoshi and Ieyasu, Ukon is forced to move from place to place—from Akashi to Kanazawa—and is eventually exiled to Manila during the Great Expulsion of Christians in 1614, dying there the following year.

### Suetsugu Kōzen and Heizō

Father and son, prominent Nagasaki merchants engaged in Red Seal Ship trade. Kōzen, originally from the Hirado Kimura family, was adopted into the wealthy Suetsugu merchant house and later expanded into Nagasaki during the height of Portuguese trade. He became both a town elder and a powerful overseas merchant. His son Heizō later framed Murayama Tōan, magistrate of outer Nagasaki, and rose to dominate both inner and outer Nagasaki as one of the city's greatest merchants. Seeking knowledge of European affairs, he financially supports Thomas Araki's studies in Rome.

### Kyūsuke and Chiyo, the Confectioners

Kyūsuke learned the making of Nanban sweets from Murayama Tōan and, through Tōan's patronage, opened his own shop. Chiyo, too, was arranged for him by Tōan—she being the daughter of Gotō Sōin. Both are Christians, but Chiyo in particular, having grown up around Christian printing culture, deeply admires Thomas as an older brother figure. She has memorized many Christian texts. Though Thomas persuades her to feign apostasy in order to survive and preserve the teachings, the "Sixtus Bible" brought back from Rome is eventually discovered in Kyūsuke's shop, and the couple resolve together to face martyrdom.

## Father Organtino (1533–1609)

Niccolò Soldo Organtino was born in Casto, northern Italy, in 1533. He entered the Society of Jesus at twenty-two, arrived in Japan in 1570, and died in Nagasaki in 1609. Fondly known among the Japanese as "Urugan Bateren," he spent thirty years in Kyoto, becoming acquainted with powerful figures such as Oda Nobunaga and Toyotomi Hideyoshi, and witnessing the turbulence of the Sengoku era firsthand. At Takayama Ukon's request, he became head of the Azuchi Seminario at age forty-seven and accepted Thomas Araki as one of its first students.

## Brother Guilherme Pereira (1541–1603)

Pereira was abandoned at birth in a Lisbon orphanage run by Father Pedro Domenech. By royal order, Domenech selected nine children from among the 160 orphans he raised and sent them to India to assist missionary work. Three boys each were assigned to Christian schools in Goa, Bassein, and Cranganore. Pereira, ten years old at the time, was among them, and at fifteen was sent onward to Japan. Two years later, in 1558, he formally entered the Society of Jesus. Gifted in languages, he was said to speak Japanese even better than many Japanese themselves, and was also fluent in Latin. He teaches Thomas Latin and entrusts to him his own unfulfilled dream of "being ordained in Rome and becoming a padre."

## ■ Main Characters from the Italian Side ■

### Cardinal Alessandro

His full name is Alessandro Ottaviano de' Medici, later Pope Leo XI (1535–1605). A Roman pope of the early seventeenth century. Though he competed with Cardinal Bellarmine for the papacy, his distant ties to the Medici family of Tuscany and the support of King Henry IV of France—whose wife was Marie de' Medici—helped him ascend to the papal throne. He died only twenty-six days after his election. In this story, he aids Thomas Araki in searching for the Sixtus Bible and arranges encounters with the imprisoned philosopher Bruno and with Eleonora in Florence.

### Pope Sixtus V (1520–1590)

Born Felice Peretti da Montalto. A late sixteenth-century pope who restored order in the Papal States, rebuilt papal finances, and transformed Rome through large-scale public works into something approaching its modern form. Though controversial, he remains one of the most accomplished popes in history. Inspired by the Japanese envoys' wish "to express the life of Jesus in Japanese," he comes to regard the revision of the Latin Bible as a divine calling and almost single-handedly completes the "Sixtus Bible."

### Giordano Bruno (1548–1600)

Italian philosopher and Dominican friar. Famous for defending Copernican heliocentrism and asserting the infinity of the universe. Even after being condemned as a heretic for denying Christ's divinity, he refused to recant and was burned at the stake in Campo de' Fiori. In this story, he offers hints about the lost "Sixtus Bible" to Thomas from his prison cell in Castel Sant'Angelo. Connected to a Medici secret society called "Incunabula," he also understands the darker side of Christianity and leaves Thomas with the words:
"Truth can never be grasped so long as one remains bound by religion."

### Beatrice Cenci (1577–1599)

Born the daughter of the Italian nobleman Francesco Cenci. She was executed, together with members of her family, for conspiring to murder her abusive father. Despite widespread public sympathy in Rome and claims of her innocence, she and nearly all her family were brutally executed at Ponte Sant'Angelo. She later became famous as the beautiful ghost said to appear upon the bridge. In this novel, she is deeply connected to the "Sixtus Bible" and belongs to a family secretly devoted to Cathar Christianity, considered by the Vatican the greatest of heresies.

### Nostradamus / Michel de Nostredame (1503–1566)

French physician, astrologer, poet, and author of works on cooking during the Renaissance. Best known for the prophetic verses collected as The Prophecies of Nostradamus, which continue to inspire believers and controversy alike. In this story, while fleeing a summons from the Inquisition and traveling through Sicily, he encounters the Franciscan friar Felice Peretti (the future Sixtus V) and predicts that he will one day become Pope. In many ways, this prophecy becomes the beginning of the story itself.

### Cardinal Roberto Bellarmine (1542–1621)

Italian Jesuit priest and cardinal of the Roman Catholic Church. One of the leading figures of the Catholic Reformation, canonized as a saint and declared a Doctor of the Church in 1930. Famous for judging Galileo during the Galileo affair, he also condemned Giordano Bruno to death. Disliked by Sixtus V, he was effectively forced into retreat during that pope's reign. After Sixtus's death, he ordered the recall of the "Sixtus Bible" on the grounds that it contained too many typographical errors and hurriedly issued the "Sixto-Clementine Bible" in its place. His major work, Disputationes de Controversiis Christianae Fidei, remains one of the most influential works on Catholic doctrine and theological controversy.

### Eleonora / Eleonora degli Albizzi (1543–1634)

Born into the noble Albizzi family of Florence. By the time of her birth, however, the Albizzi family had already declined alongside the rise of the Medici. At fourteen, she caught the eye of Cosimo I of Tuscany and became his mistress. Later, to suppress scandal, she was married off to the dissolute noble Carlo. Accused of adultery involving Piero de' Medici, she was confined to a convent for women accused of unchastity, where she eventually died at the age of ninety-one.

### Francesco I (1541–1587)

Grand Duke of Tuscany. Son of Cosimo I and Eleonora di Toledo. Though married to Joanna, daughter of Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand I, he openly kept Bianca Cappello as his mistress even during his wife's lifetime. After Joanna's sudden death, he married Bianca. Increasingly withdrawn from politics in later years, he devoted himself to villas and laboratories, becoming the subject of rumors that he produced poisons while Bianca administered them. In 1587, both he and Bianca died while his brother Ferdinando was visiting their villa. Though long attributed to malaria, recent studies suggest arsenic poisoning. The true culprit remains unknown.

### Bianca Cappello (1548–1587)

Second wife of Grand Duke Francesco I de' Medici. Born into the wealthy Venetian Cappello family and celebrated as one of the great beauties of the late Renaissance. At fifteen, she eloped to Florence with Pietro Bonaventuri, a Florentine serving the Salviati family. There she attracted the attention of Francesco I and became his mistress. Although Francesco already had a wife, Joanna, Bianca became his official consort after Joanna's death. Often portrayed as a femme fatale, she is depicted here instead as a woman painfully aware of how women are manipulated by power, and as a sympathetic ally to Eleonora.

### Cosimo I (1519–1574)

The first Grand Duke of Tuscany. A member of a cadet branch of the Medici family, he was the son of the famed mercenary commander Giovanni delle Bande Nere and Maria Salviati, and grandson of the legendary Caterina Sforza. In 1537, after the assassination of Duke Alessandro of Florence, the eighteen-year-old Cosimo inherited the duchy. With Habsburg support, he established centralized rule in Florence and laid the foundations of the city we know today. Yet in old age he became consumed by women, even taking as his mistress the fourteen-year-old Eleonora, whose godmother had been his late wife, before later abandoning her for her cousin Camilla Martelli.

### Cosimo the Elder (1389–1464)

Cosimo de' Medici, the great merchant prince who ruled Renaissance Florence. Son of the wealthy banker Giovanni di Bicci de' Medici. During his time, the Medici family was temporarily exiled by the oligarchic Albizzi faction, only for the Albizzi themselves to be driven out the following year, allowing Cosimo to return and seize effective control of the city. Closely allied with the people, he fostered commerce and industry, supported artists such as Donatello and Fra Filippo Lippi, established the Platonic Academy, and helped shape Renaissance culture itself. After his death, he was honored with the title "Father of the Fatherland."

## ■ Main Characters from the French Side ■

### Thomas the Deaf-Mute

One of the twin children of Raymond VII, Count of Toulouse. His twin sister is Jeanne, while Thomas, unable to speak even by the age of three, is discovered to be deaf and mute and is sent away to live with a farming family. At the time, Cathar Christianity flourished in southern France, and both the French crown and the Vatican launched the Albigensian Crusade to eradicate it. Defeated in the conflict, Raymond VII is forced not only to marry his daughter Jeanne to Alphonse, brother of King Louis IX, but also to send Thomas to a monastery in Paris. Later, Thomas joins the Cathars during the Second Albigensian Crusade.

### Raymond VII, Count of Toulouse (1197–1249)

A great lord ruling much of southern France, from the foothills of the Pyrenees to the Mediterranean coast of the Côte d'Azur. His territory occupied a key position in Mediterranean trade routes linking southern commerce with northern Europe, giving him enough wealth and influence to challenge the French crown itself. For the Kingdom of France, unifying the country required conquering the south. For the Vatican, the powerful Cathar heresy had to be destroyed. These twin aims led directly to the brutal Albigensian Crusade.

### Esclarmonde

One of the leading female figures of the Cathars. Sister of Count Raymond Roger of Foix and widow of the Lord of Jordanne. She becomes a friend and understanding companion to Thomas the Deaf-Mute. At the fall of Montségur, she receives the consolamentum and chooses death by fire. Before dying, she entrusts Thomas with the "Gospel of Mary."

### Louis IX (1214–1270)

Ninth king of the Capetian dynasty of France and son of Louis VIII. Canonized after death and later known as Saint Louis. Ancestor of the Bourbon dynasty, from whom many later French kings inherited the name Louis. A ruler devoted to internal reform and long-lasting peace, he earned the title "arbiter of Europe" through his efforts to settle conflicts both within and beyond France. Revered for his piety and noble character, he was regarded as the ideal Christian king. In this story, needing to govern southern France after the Cathar conflicts, he sends Thomas undercover among the Cathars as a spy to investigate their religion and culture.

## ■ Main Characters in the Modern Era ■

### Yasuo

While attending a night university, Yasuo works in Osaka as a production assistant at a commercial film company. Around the time he is assigned to a Rome location shoot, he begins suffering from strange visions. During the shoot in Rome, the hallucinations return, and he disappears inside St. Peter's Basilica. During his disappearance, he relives the life of Thomas Araki, who lived between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

### Imuta

Works in the art department of the same production company as Yasuo. An older friend and confidant to him. Originally aspiring to become a painter, he gave up his dream in order to marry his wife, Sayaka. Deeply knowledgeable about European art, he works together with his spiritually sensitive wife in Japan to uncover the mystery behind Yasuo's disappearance.

### Sayaka

Her family was destroyed by her father's religious fanaticism, leading her into a troubled adolescence. She eventually regains stability through the guidance of her homeroom teacher, Mr. Furuno Kisshō. Forced to work as a stripper to survive, she later marries Imuta after he falls in love with her. After marriage, her naturally heightened sensitivity deepens into an awareness of unseen worlds, and during Yasuo's disappearance she attempts to locate him through the realm of consciousness itself.

### Fuji Nobutsugu

A producer active since the earliest days of Japanese television. His reckless spending forces him to flee Tokyo and relocate to an Osaka commercial production company. Fond of Yasuo, he insists:
"If I don't train that kid myself, he'll never survive in this business."
As a result, he always assigns Yasuo to the productions he oversees. After Yasuo disappears during the Rome shoot, Fuji remains in Rome and, while coordinating with Imuta in Japan, continues searching for him.

Behind the Collegio Romano in Rome